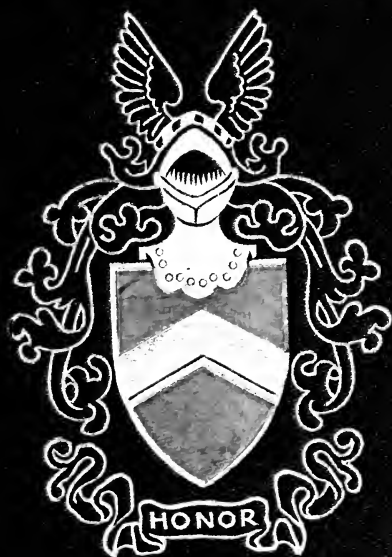
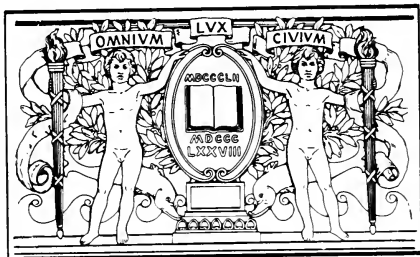


THE HONOR OF THE BRAXTONS



J·WILLIAM FOSDICK



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The Honor of the Braxtons



Alina Durlan.

A NOVEL

By

J. WILLIAM FOSDICK

Author of

"THE MASTERPIECE OF MONSIEUR BLANC" and
OTHER STORIES



NEW YORK

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To
the most valiant critic,
the bravest censor,
and the gentlest helper,
My Wife

The HONOR OF THE BRAXTONS

Chapter I

“**A**ND she is going to Paris of all places!”

The widow looked up from her novel despairingly. A noisy group of horse-billiard players were shuffling wooden disks along the smooth deck of the *Champagne*.

The object of the widow's remarks, the only woman in the group, was young, pretty and wore a golf suit.

The widow of banker Van Kleer was fashionable and worldly wise. The young lady in question who was going to Paris to study painting, possessed neither of these qualities. Chance brought them together in “room 56.”

The widow had read the girl's name plainly lettered on her steamer trunk—Alina Durlan, Montclair, N. J. “Provincial!” she thought, “alone! unprotected! I must chaperone her!” but she met with poor success. The young woman went about her affairs and chose her associates in a way that often shocked her roommate. With the innocent, exuberant, self-reliance of youth, she paid but little heed to Mrs. Van Kleer's conventional advice.

As the players finished their game the widow dropped her book and joined Miss Durlan. Linked arm in arm

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they walked for some time, battling with the roystering north wind. They broke into peals of laughter at the comical plights in which they were left by this impertinent breeze.

Once they found themselves clinging to the railing while they watched the steerage passengers at their rough games upon the deck below. A half score of Italian laborers were dancing to the music of an accordion. Grouped about them was a heterogeneous company such as cosmopolitan New York alone could put aboard a steamer. The Italians looked contented. They had served their time digging the trenches of New York and were going back to Italy with well filled pockets.

"Look at that hoary old Jew," said Miss Durlan, "see how his white locks sing against that pile of cordage."

Not far from the old man were two French peasants. The man, a low browed, ill favored fellow, scowled at his wife with small, bead like eyes:

"What a horrible face!" Miss Durlan turned to her companion.

"The head of a murderer!" exclaimed the widow.

"He has struck her again!" Alina caught at the rail and gazed downwards, horrified. "I told the purser this morning that the brute ought to be put in irons. Think of striking a poor, sickly creature like that."

Two young men stood very near the peasants. One of them uttered a cry and sprang forward, but his friend seized his arm exclaiming—"What is the use, old man!"

The widow gave vent to a sigh of relief as she saw the young man held in check by his friend. "He is

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too fine a fellow to come within range of that beast, my goodness! What flaxen hair, it is almost white. Oh Alina!" A scream escaped her lips as the north wind bore Miss Durlan's tam-o-shanter aloft and sent it scurrying seawards but it lodged in the shrouds high above the deck.

Immediately the same young man was in the shrouds, climbing with cat-like agility. He caught the tam-o-shanter in his nervous grasp and in a twinkling was down again.

Soon his active shoulders and bright young face appeared above the rail. There was respectful admiration in his glance as he quietly said. "No trouble at all!" in response to the young lady's profuse thanks. As he swung himself down to the steerage deck Alina gathered up the golden brown strands which were lashing her cheek and fastening the tam-o-shanter firmly in place with a long hat pin bade defiance to the north wind, but Mrs. Van Kleer said it was too fresh on deck and they went below.

In the saloon they found a party of amateur musicians rehearsing for the ship's concert which was coming off that night. Poor little sailor's orphans; if they but knew how the traveling public of two continents suffers for their sake.

The concert itself was a warmed-over feast, for the rehearsing went on all the afternoon. Mrs. Van Kleer and her room-mate had been listening somewhat carelessly when a sensitive touch upon the keys arrested their attention. Their eyes met in surprise for Alina's flaxen

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haired Bayard sat at the piano. His friend stood beside him and in an instant the cabin was filled with the vibrations of a sonorous barytone voice.

Throwing herself upon the cabin seat, Alina stuffed a soft cushion behind her head and with half closed eyes became conscious that the mighty, sweeping melody was bearing her onwards—upwards with resistless cadence, away from the stuffy cabin with its ill assorted company.

She was rudely awakened by the noisy hand clapping. She heard Mrs. Van Kleer exclaim "I do think the Messiah grand! I wonder who they are?" The two musicians were modestly bowing their acknowledgments of the rapturous applause.

"Two painters on their way to Paris!" volunteered a passenger at her elbow. "They are crossing in the steerage."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the widow. "How can they? and they look like gentlemen too!"

"They are heroes!" broke in Alina with glowing eyes. "Do you ever hear of doctors or lawyers or men of other professions sacrificing their pride to that extent?"

No; the widow had never heard of such a thing. People in the smart set never did such things. She failed to understand exactly why they were heroes. As the concert closed, Alina pressed forward to thank the two men for what they had done but the purser informed her that they had gone to the steerage.

"Heroes! Well, I should say so!" she murmured as she recrossed the saloon and then shuddered at the memory of a visit once made to the steerage.

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As the days wore on Mrs. Van Kleer vainly tried to satisfy her curiosity as to Miss Durlan's antecedents, but back of her companion's naive exterior she found a wall of reserve which no amount of clever questioning could penetrate. The little that she learned came through the avenue of the young woman's profession which seemed to dominate her nature.

One day Mrs. Van Kleer asked if she might see some of the girl's work. In response Alina reached into her steamer trunk and unrolling an unstretched canvas, held it up for inspection. It was a faithful study of a mighty stallion with dilated nostrils and alert ears.

"And this is your specialty?" Mrs. Van Kleer looked at her in amazement.

"Yes; I had rather paint a horse than any living thing. They are more beautiful than anything else."

"But aren't you afraid of them?"

"Afraid of them!" Miss Durlan laughed. "Afraid of my best friends? I should say not. I trust them more than most people."

The widow was not sensitive and drew no invidious conclusions. She found her room-mate an indefatigable worker. As the lazy ocean days droned along Alina sketched incessantly. When not engaged in drawing her fellow passengers, she would station herself up forward with a little Skye terrier whom she called Jack curled up at her feet and make color sketches of clouds and sky with the vast expanse of rolling sea beneath.

At last, on a sunny day, the two white light-houses

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of Havre were descried by the passengers of the *Cham-pagne*—mere spots of white upon the coast line.

As the ship came to a stop before the port, the white sands of Trouville could be seen shining in the sunlight.

Alina, standing alone far forward with half closed eyes and head tilted to one side, took in the long sweep of shore, noting the purplish blue shadows and luminous, vaporous sky.

"If France is like this what must Venice be?" she thought turning to watch a clumsy, red-sailed fishing boat, battling with the many currents and eddies of the Seine's great estuary.

As the ship steamed into the *avant port*, she noticed the tiled roofs, quaint houses, and ponderous stone docks.

There are many Americans, born in the midst of painfully new surroundings in whom there lies dormant such an intense thirst for anything really traditional or historic that when they first see one of these European ports they experience a warm heart glow not unlike that caused by a home coming after a long absence. Alina was one of these.

The scent of wood fires, the cries and horn blasts of the fisher folks, the peculiar quality of sound in the tolling of a bell as it came over the water, the queerly bloused and bonneted peasantry running along the edge of the dock, gave her untold pleasure.

Her reveries were brought to an abrupt termination by a commotion upon the deck below, where the steerage passengers were waiting ready to land, surrounded by their nondescript piles of luggage.



The Port of Havre.

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At first she saw little else than a tangled mass of humanity surging about some invisible object. The crowd suddenly lurched towards her and parted for a moment. Two struggling figures rolled into view ; one, a brutal, uncouth French peasant whose eyes seemed starting from their sockets with fear and strangulation. Over him with both hands clutched tight about his victim's throat, with a knee embedded in the fallen man's chest was the flaxen haired American.

"You beast!" he hissed between clinched teeth, "I'll teach you to beat a poor, sick woman!"

With parted lips and horror struck face Alina leaned far out over the rail. As the two figures writhed backwards and forwards the motley crowd now closed in on them, now retreated.

The American's quick attack had stunned the hulking peasant into temporary submission, but his antagonist's face was growing white and he could feel the slender fingers relaxing their hold upon his throat.

Gradually, by a supreme effort he squirmed and braced his heavy body against the deck house. Then there fell upon Alina's ears a savage cry of victory. The American was down.

"Quick! Help! he will kill him!" She shuddered as she covered her face with her hands but only for a moment. When she looked down again the Frenchman lay sprawling in the port scuppers and the American's companion, the singer of the Messiah was hurling overboard the knife that he had wrested from the ruffian's hand.

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The strangely assorted company, man, woman and child, watched the blade as it described a half circle over their heads and fell into the water with a sharp splash, then pandemonium reigned.

In its midst stood the two Americans, one pale, exhausted, distraught. The other ruddy and strong, his arm thrust protectingly through his friend's, a fierce look about his jaw and mouth, but in his eyes an expression of solicitude so tender, so true that Alina longed to grasp the strong right hand that had saved her Bayard.

As though by some subtle telepathy he raised his head and their glances met.

She never could have told in words what her glowing, grateful face expressed at that moment.

The rich color mounted to his temples as he turned to speak to his companion, then the two faces were turned upwards as with uncovered heads they modestly acknowledged the applause of the first cabin passengers who crowded against the promenade deck rail. Evidently ill at ease beneath the stare of so many curious eyes the men disappeared between decks.

In an hour's time, after they had passed through the annoyances and confusion of landing, Alina and the widow were seated in a first class compartment of the *rapide* speeding southwards, the ever changing panorama of winding river, wooded islands and thatched huts engrossing their attention.

Every now and then the two Americans would come between Alina and the fleeting landscape with peculiar poignancy. She could see their gentle intelligent faces

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looking up at her so bravely, hemmed in by the sea of dogged ignorant humanity. She wondered from whence they had come and whether she would ever see them again.

As they approached Paris, Mrs. Van Kleer gave Miss Durlan her card. "If you ever need a friend don't fail to call on me! Come and see me at all events!"

"Thanks!" said Alina with her straightforward smile—"O, never fear, I shall be all right! There will be no trouble!"

Chapter II

MADAME PAPILLON'S fatness approached obesity. Her name would have better suited her twenty years before, when she was a milliner's pretty assistant in the Rue de la Paix.

Having passed through the highly-colored career of a Parisian grisette she had at last, like so many of her class, found a comfortable position as the wife of a *concierge*. As she often said to Monsieur Papillon, the position of door-keeper, if humble, is not to be despised.

Was not their little office home at 25 Quai St. Michel with its glass doors a small kingdom of itself? Could the keeper of a feudal draw-bridge have more power? The position, however, had its annoyances; the large painter's studio on the top floor had remained unrented all summer and Madame Papillon had suffered mentally and physically, as day after day she had dragged herself up the six long flights with the hope that the stranger following in her ample wake might take the studio.

On a warm afternoon Madame Papillon had just made one of the fruitless ascents, and, seated in her low chair before the house door was fanning her hot shining cheeks with her apron. The inclination of her beetling eyebrows was far from reassuring to the passer by.

From her position she could easily see all that transpired on the street. The familiar nods which she received from the cheese vendors, bed makers and dog

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shearers indicated that she was one of the fixtures of the quarter.

An omnibus came rumbling down the street, with a complement of inside passengers and but two on the roof. As it thundered past the door, one of the outside passengers sprang to his feet and pointing at the little notice over Madame Papillon's door which read—"*Atelier à Louer*," rapidly descended to the ground while his companion followed more deliberately.

Madame Papillon knew only too well what this meant, so she sullenly settled her ample form into the chair. The young man approached, rapidly uttered a few words in some foreign tongue and pointed to the sign above the door. Madame's only response was to raise her shoulders and eyebrows as she muttered—" *Je ne comprends pas*" whereupon the other stranger produced a letter from his pocket and handed it to her with an air of deferential politeness.

Madame tore it open and read. The effect was electrical. She sprang to her feet—"So you are friends of Monsieur Thomas!" she exclaimed. "*A bon garçon Monsieur Thomas!* He occupied the studio three years. Yes! Yes! I will certainly show the studio, if the Monsieurs will take the pains to mount with me."

She talked rapidly as they climbed the stairs, quite ignoring the fact that the young men spoke but little French and understood less.

As they reached the top landing, Madame Papillon reeled against the iron railing and pointed at a low door

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at the end of a dark corridor—"Here is the key" she gasped in a hoarse whisper—"I will not keep you waiting—open it yourselves."

They fumbled at the lock for a moment and when the door suddenly opened, found themselves blinded by a flood of light which came from a lofty, uncurtained studio window. Both men uttered an exclamation of surprise. The low, tunnel-like passage and door made the studio appear high and spacious.

By this time Madame Papillon had recovered her breath. She rapidly recited the many advantages which the place afforded. The young men seemed pleased from the first and she finally descended to her little office, with a light heart. They had taken the studio, a great, dusty, bare place with a small bedroom leading off from it. The whole a dingy slate gray, spotted with nail holes; yet it represented the heart's desire of these two young men. Incomprehensible though it may seem to most people, it represented the realization, the laying hold upon that for which they had hoped and striven for many years.

The place was old and in bad repair, but what did it matter? They were in the Latin Quarter of Paris and that sufficed.

They had only to step out upon the wide balcony which extended across the entire front of the studio to see the Palace of the Louvre rising above the Pont Neuf and river mists down-stream, while up-stream gray old Nôtre Dame loomed skywards, a marvel of Gothic lace work bathed in the afternoon sunlight, and what sunlight!

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Felix Braxton said he had not seen any like it since he left Virginia.

As he leaned out over the railing to gaze still further up-stream, the sunlight touched his blonde hair which a little breeze had tossed into a tangle. His friend involuntarily tipped his head on one side as he rolled a cigarette and lighted it murmuring—"Stunning! simply stunning!"

Standing upon the sunlit balcony with Paris stretching out before them, the two young men forgot in this supreme moment the many obstacles against which they had pitted their youthful courage. Years of careful saving, the breaking of home ties, their doubts and fears, the loathsome steerage were all of little consequence now. A new life loomed before them, gigantic with possibilities. They were in Paris—great, glorious Paris!

How often during the "rests" of the model at the Boston Art School had the men talked of this moment. In the musty atmosphere of the old carved oak room in the Art Museum, a small piece of the old world which they loved, it was resolved time and time again that one or the other must carry off the Chanler scholarship, to which Cushing would add the small allowance doled out by his rich, but unwilling parent and they would share the common fund, crossing the Atlantic in the steerage if necessary. Millet, Bridgman, and Vonnoh had crossed in the steerage, why not they?

So when Braxton took the scholarship, the pride of the Virginia cavaliers and that of the water side of

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Beacon Street was suppressed and in the steamship agent's book were registered just below that of Antonio Moreno, Laborer, the names of Felix Braxton and Benjamin Cushing, Artists.

Chapter III

THAT first Monday in Paris! They dressed by candle light and hurried through the cold gray mists to a little *crémèrie* in the Rue St. Jacques. They gulped down their bowls of *café au lait* in haste for they had been told that it was necessary to be at the Academy early in order to secure good places. With rapid steps they crossed the two bridges, picked their way through the tangle of vegetable vendors at the Great Central Market and followed up the Rue Montmartre as far as the Grand Boulevard.

They entered the glass roofed arcade known as the *Passage des Panoramas*. A strange place for a school, they thought as they passed toy shops, jewelers' shops and a pipe establishment.

Traversing almost the entire length of the arcade they turned into a smaller gallery and halted questioningly before a low doorway over which was nailed a stained pasteboard sign which read—" *Académie de Peinture.*" The two friends looked at each other in mute disappointment. They had doubtless been misinformed. "The great Académie Julian over a pork butcher's shop? No; surely not!"

As they stood discussing the possibility of finding the real Académie Julian, a long haired French youth who wore a flat brimmed silk hat and flowing cravat accosted them in broken English.

"What do the *Messieurs* look for? The *Académie*

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Julian? Yes—yes—it is here! If the *Messieurs* will mount with me *au premier?* ”

Yes, they would ; so up the dirty, narrow staircase they stumbled, still under the impression that there must be a mistake somewhere.

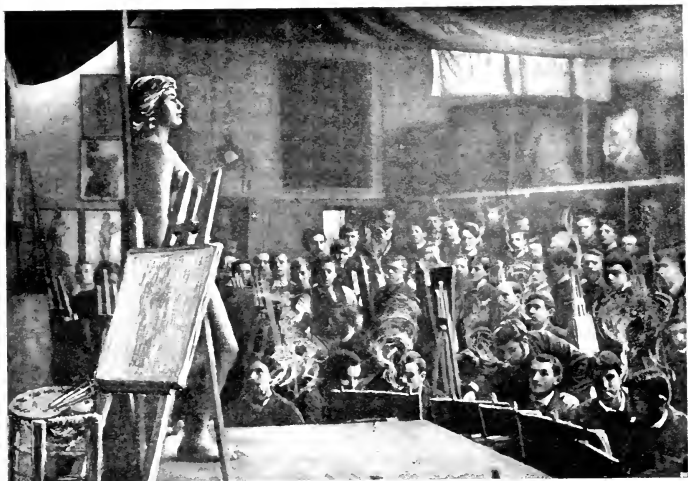
The student pushed them somewhat unceremoniously through a doorway upon the panels of which was painted a life size figure of a bald headed man making a salam to the visitor.

They found themselves in a suffocating atmosphere, heavy with tobacco smoke. In an instant they felt the gaze of no less than fifty pairs of eyes, while a great unintelligible shout deafened their ears.

The door by which they had entered was behind the model platform upon which stood a nude Italian girl. Standing about or sitting upon rush bottomed stools of all sizes were the students, as unkempt a crowd of ruffians as they had ever seen. All wore paint bedaubed blouses which were in harmony with the walls of the room, where the scrapings of innumerable palettes had been plastered for many years.

The swarthy skinned model had taken one pose after another, in vain attempt to suit the excited students who were wrangling like a lot of urchins at marbles.

At sight of the two Americans, proceedings came to a sudden end. Then from all sides came first a low growl but ever increasing in volume, until the dingy glass skylights rattled with their frenzied shrieks, “*Punch! P-o-o-n-c-h! P-o-o-o-n-c-h!* The *nouveaux* must pay a *punch!* ”



“ They found themselves in a suffocating atmosphere heavy with tobacco smoke. Was this the great Académie Julian ? ”

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The Americans endeavored to assume an air of indifference as they crossed the room and hung up their overcoats and hats. As they turned to face the howling mob of students, a fusillade of breadcrusts commenced. Then there came a sudden lull as a big Frenchman mounted the platform and pushing the model aside, tacked a piece of drawing paper to the background upon which he scrawled with a bit of charcoal—" *The Americans must pay a punch!* "

So the Americans paid their punch which was served by a bushy headed Frenchman from the platform, while the *nouveaux* mounted high stools and sang each a comic song when comparative order was restored.

The newcomers chose two easels at the back of the room and began their first day's work in Paris, but oh; the sinking at the heart; the wonderment that this could be the Mecca of their pilgrimage. Was this the great Académie Julian?

* * * * *

On Wednesday the great Roan would come to criticize. The two Americans had labored early and late that their work might be sufficiently advanced. A French student had offered to interpret for them as the master did not speak English. With what interest did the friends watch the keen gray eyes and vainly try to comprehend the quick caustic utterances of the greatest critic in Paris, as he passed from student to student. Felix was the last to receive the master's criticism. The exit of the professor from the class was usually the signal for

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an outburst of pent-up spirits, but on this occasion the master's footsteps could be heard for a full minute upon the stairs. Expectancy seemed to pervade the smoky air; utter silence prevailed.

It was an intense moment for Felix. He had waited impatiently as the master slowly worked his way through the tangle of easels and students. He cursed the luck that had made him the last man of the last row and now that the master was gone he still waited, the nervous tension of the moment paling his cheek. He struggled to quiet the painful throbbing of his heart. Why did the interpreter hesitate? Was there anything to keep back?

"Well; what did he say?" he turned impatiently. "Vot deed e say?" The little man raised his shoulders until they touched his long hair. "E say you no good! E say you much better go back to l'Amérique! E say you never can draw!"

There was the crash of an overturned paint box. An American student started forward with frightened face. Felix tottered forward white to the lips. The American student caught him by the arm with a fearful look. Surely he will fall. But no; Felix shakes him off and with sudden strength born of a burning wrath, tears his drawing in twain and hastens from the room. The jeering laughter of the students rings in his ears, yes keeps on ringing long after he has crossed the Seine and is pacing the floor of his own silent studio, high above the noisy river traffic.

Cushing failed to grasp the situation until Felix had

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left the room. "Stop!" he cried. "It's a lie! Can't you see that these damned monkeys are guying you?" But his voice was lost in the din which followed his friend's exit.

He started to follow Felix and bring him back. On second thought he turned to the interpreter. A hundred curious eyes were watching intently. As he seized the little man by the collar a great shout went up—"Coward! He fears a man of his size! *A la porte!* Put him out!"

Dragging the Frenchman behind him he swept aside easels and stools and made straight for the model platform.

The yells were deafening as he discovered the bushy-headed bully of the *atelier* standing in his path. His arms were folded, a sinister, challenging smile was upon his lips. It was only the work of a moment. There was a terrible crash and the bully tried to extricate himself from a confusion of wrecked canvases, paint boxes and easels, while he nursed a half closed eye.

Ben made history that morning at Julian's. His unerring "left" became one of the traditions of the *atelier*.

Dropping the frightened interpreter upon a high stool he mounted the platform. With a backward throw of the shoulders he raised himself to his full height. A commanding wave of the hand compelled silence.

He spoke as he had struck; quickly, firmly, straight from the shoulder. "Messieurs; I congratulate you! Your admirable joke has been most successful. It is quite possible that at this moment my friend is throwing himself into the Seine. What more could you want?"

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But mind! If I find him alive he will come back to the *atelier* and the first man who dares molest him must pay the reckoning here! *here!* Do you understand?"

With clinched fist he struck his broad chest blow after blow. Turning quickly he grasped the interpreter by the collar and lifted him to the platform. "Now you drivelling little ape; put that into good French and mind you tell them every word!"

When the Frenchman had finished his harangue Ben stepped down from the platform. The students fell silently away as he quietly sought the door. The spell of that terrible "left" was still upon them.

* * * * *

In the studio by the river Felix was suffering untold tortures. The humiliating thought that perhaps he could not draw after those years of work had all but driven him mad. When Ben came home he found him gazing into nothingness with a face so drawn and death-like that he stood for a moment horror struck.

"Don't look like that old man! It is all a lie, a beastly hoax!" He hastened to Felix's side and put a kindly arm about him. "They were hazing us! That little rascal Boschet lied! Rovin said you had talent, lots of it! One of the Americans who understands French told me so."

"Talent?" Felix started up eager, hungry for just such words. His face lighted as Ben cried "Indeed he did! It is the first time he has praised a *nouveau* this season!"

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But Felix's face clouded again. He clutched the table edge fiercely.

"Talent, yes; but they insulted me! Of what use is talent to me now?"

"You will go back to the academy Monday!"

Felix was pacing the floor excitedly but came to a sudden halt before Ben.

"Do you take me for an ass, Ben. Do you think I have no pride? Do you want me to kill that little cur?"

"O bother Boschet!" Cushing bit his pipe stem and tried to restore a faint spark within to a glow while he executed a counter march with Felix.

"He was only hazing you. You let that nasty Southern temper of yours run away with you. It was all a huge joke, can't you understand?"

"No; I can't! And you New Englanders can never understand a Southerner's sense of honor!" Felix halted suddenly. "I suppose it is for policy's sake and because you won't allow your business to be interrupted, that you overlook an insult now and then and forget that you are less a gentleman on that account. I tell you I was not brought up that way! No sir! A Braxton has too fine a sense of honor to tolerate such a thing!" He swung back his arm with a gesture of contempt.

"Come—Come!" Ben was pleading in earnest. "You forget that in Paris you are only an ordinary foreigner. You assume too much when you expect Boschet and his friends to act like Virginians in Virginia. You are in Paris not Braxton County. Great

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heavens man! Have you a century to live that you can afford to squander time in this way?"

Felix started. He glanced up at Ben from the chair into which he had thrown himself.

"A century? Heaven knows I haven't! I—I—am the biggest fool in all Paris! I will go back to-morrow!"

Chapter IV

“*M*ON DIEU Charles! Have we another Commune? *Allons!* Quick! Put out the light! Close the shutters!”

Madame Papillon hurried to the *porte cochère* and looked up the Quai St. Michel.

A hooting mob was coming her way. She slammed the door and opening the little grated window peered out with bated breath.

The cat calls and shrieks came nearer and nearer. She heard the sound of wheels and cries of “*A bas Duchâtel! To the guillotine!*”

A two-wheeled butcher’s cart drawn by a score of men passed the door. In it stood a young man. His face was pale. His dark frightened eyes were cast downwards. His arms were tied behind him with a hempen rope.

“Down with Duchâtel! Long live the models! Long live the Realists!” The quay resounded with their cries.

“Duchâtel again! Will they give the man no peace? These students are *gamins—canaille!*” Madame Papillon shrugged her fat shoulders and opening the door watched the crowd until it turned into the Rue St. Jacques. “All because he paints without models—and why not? Does not François, the bedmaker’s son, paint without models every day at the Fête de Neuilly? *Diable*—and he has great talent too! Why all this fuss about Duchâtel?”

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"They say it is his paper. He is editor you know!" Monsieur Papillon dragged out two chairs and they seated themselves before the door.

"*Comment s'appelle t'il?*" The Ec—Ecstasist! Ah yes; I recall it now! I read of it only yesterday in the *Petit Journal*. *Mon Dieu!* Here they come again!"

The little man retreated in doors. Madame scowled and settled herself in her chair, but started to her feet at sight of flashing sabers and uniforms. The crowd retreated from the Rue St. Jacques across the bridge and melted away beneath the shadow of Notre Dame.

"The police! *Enfin* the gamins like to play with them—*Tiens!* Some one arrested? Ho there!" She accosted a student of the neighborhood who came hurrying towards her "Who is he?" she nodded her head towards a man whom a number of policemen were escorting along the quay.

"Do you not know him Madame? That is Rouvier the great novelist—anarchist! It was he who started the riot. He hates Duchâtel. Duchâtel was once a priest. Rouvier detests the priests. *Ma foi* it was droll! Duchâtel will have nothing of the models. He damns them in his journal. They found Octavie the model in the little Rue St. Jacques—she poses at Julian's. '*A la voiture! A la voiture!*' cries Rouvier and up beside Duchâtel they put her. Then—ah then—*ma foi* it was funny—they bind her arms about him *comme cela!*" The man shrieked with laughter as he threw his arms about Monsieur Papillon's neck.

"They drive down the Boulevard to the Place Maubert

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—the wagon stops—*O—la—la!* What a dance—all around the cart, then——” He opened his hands outwards, shrugged his shoulders and jerked his head towards the departing squad of police. “*Bonsoir Madame! Bonsoir Monsieur!*” He raised his hat and hurried on.

Except for the distant rumble of a cab the quay was quiet once more.

The woman knitted a coarse blue stocking in silence.

Monsieur Papillon folded his hands across his waistcoat. His chin sank into his chest. He was soon in a land where the *concierge* spends much of his time.

A spare, drooping figure came along the quay with dragging steps. He hesitated before the stone stairway leading down to the canal, then hurried on at sight of the Papillons.

“Hist!”

Monsieur Papillon started to a bolt upright. His scull cap rolled to the pavement.

Madame Papillon caught him by the arm. “Did you see him?”

“Who—*imbécile?* By the saints of Dijon, would you frighten me to death?”

“Duchâtel! See there he goes! It is he!”

* * * * *

“*Sapristi!* But he could paint! See how the master modelled that cheek and how one feels the bone beneath the skin. What chance, my friends, to breathe the atmosphere surrounding such a *chef-d'œuvre*. You do well to come from America to gaze upon this picture alone.”

The HONOR of the BRAXTONS

In the silence which followed these words a young woman engaged in copying Paul Potter's "White Horse" turned from her work with questioning eyes in which there was a look of recognition, but such was the abstraction of the students that she was passed unnoticed.

The speaker was small, a mere pigmy as he stood between the two young men whom he called "friends."

With arms interlocked the trio left the Van Dyck portrait and passed on to a Frans Hals at the end of the long gallery of the Louvre. The Frenchman talked volubly while the other two listened with respectful attention.

It was easy to recognize Braxton and Cushing although during a few months the men had made radical changes in their dress.

Felix's responsive Southern nature had already welcomed the easy going ways of the Latin Quarter. With corduroy suit, flat brimmed tall hat, huge flowing cravat and clustering locks he looked the genuine Bohemian. Cushing on the other hand had cast aside his "bell top" for a soft Alpine and wore a rough English tweed suit. He still looked an Anglo-Saxon and always did to the end of his days.

Boschet, for the third man was none other than he, had become a welcome companion in their pilgrimages to the Louvre.

After his return to the academy, Felix worked with fanatical zeal and accomplished wonders. He instinctively avoided Boschet, who in his turn left Felix to himself. He had not forgotten Ben's gladiatorial speech.



"Students at play. Académie Julian."

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One day while the model was resting, Felix left his work and crossing the room chatted with an American student who presently called his attention to the fact that Boschet was standing before Felix's easel.

Felix glanced across the room with contracted brows. "What deviltry is the little monkey up to now?" he muttered.

A crowd of curious students had gathered about Boschet. Felix's companion had followed their example to return shortly with a radiant face. "I congratulate you Braxton!" he said, holding out his hand. "Boschet has been saying fine things of your work!"

"Bah!" said Felix bitterly. "Does it make an atom of difference one way or the other what Boschet thinks of my work?"

"I should say yes, most emphatically!" replied his companion. "That is if you care for the praise of the strongest student in the Academy, in Paris for that matter. Boschet ranked second in the *concours* for the Prize of Rome last year and is sure to come in first this year. He isn't much to look at, but he *can* paint!"

All of this Felix found to be true; furthermore that this grotesque little man who could stoop to any deviltry for a moment's amusement had a warm impulsive heart and a technique which was the envy of all.

As for Cushing, he had a good laugh one day, having discovered that he had not only been guilty of jerking the Prize of Rome winner about by the collar, but had called Boschet, the already great Boschet, the finest draughtsman in the academy "a drivelling ape."

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After the three men had spent some time before the Frans Hals they retraced their steps to stop once more before the Van Dyck. As Felix glanced from the portrait to the lower line of pictures, he noticed the copyist at work before the Paul Potter.

Instantly his eyes sought Ben's who nodded back a recognition. Felix never forgot a striking face and this one possessed the added charm of beauty. He remembered so well the picture she made clinging to the hurricane deck rail; how the strong ocean breeze tugged at her fluttering garments revealing the lines of a young, supple figure.

The trio passed on, Felix trying to draw conclusions as to the intentions of a swarthy Italian painter who came up at the moment and engaged the girl in a lively conversation.

"Charming! *si joli!*" exclaimed Boschet with a meaning smile. "The Italian finishes her copy. They dine *à la Bohème* at Suresnes—*Enfin*—you know the rest."

He shrugged his shoulders but winced as he felt his arm in a vice-like grip.

"Stop! You forget. She is an American!" There was a look in Ben's face that Boschet had seen before and feared.

"*Ah, oui—oui*, American to be sure! Your American girls are wonderful, beautiful, clever, virtuous, there are none like them. They come, they go, they dine without chaperons. They even smoke cigarettes and one sees them sipping *absinthe* at the Café de Paris.

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They go with their gentlemen friends to the Bullier, the Moulin Rouge—Ah yes, your American girls are wonderful.” Again Boschet smiled, this time a quizzical, puzzled smile.

Felix laughed as he thrust his arm into the Frenchman’s. “Come Boschet; you will lose the *Prix de Rome* if you try to understand the American girl. It is an all summer’s job—eh Ben?”

“There are girls and girls,” was the latter’s only response as he released Boschet’s arm.

As they passed below the “Winged Victory” Felix laughingly declared that she symbolized the American girl in all her freedom.

They descended the broad staircase to the court and the Place du Carrousel. Out into the sunlight they strolled, their footsteps echoing under the great archways as they passed on to the river—that wonderful river with the traditions of centuries buried in its turbulent bed. Fascinating and terrible; lovely and hideous; as the teeming life along its banks chances to make it; always interesting to the student of art for here he finds color, atmosphere, life.

They loitered upon the middle span of the bridge, the noisy procession of cabs and busses at their backs, the swirling spring torrent below.

The little steamers were making a brave struggle against the fierce current. The floating bath houses were trebly chained. The fishermen idling along the lower quays might just as well have been at home. What fish

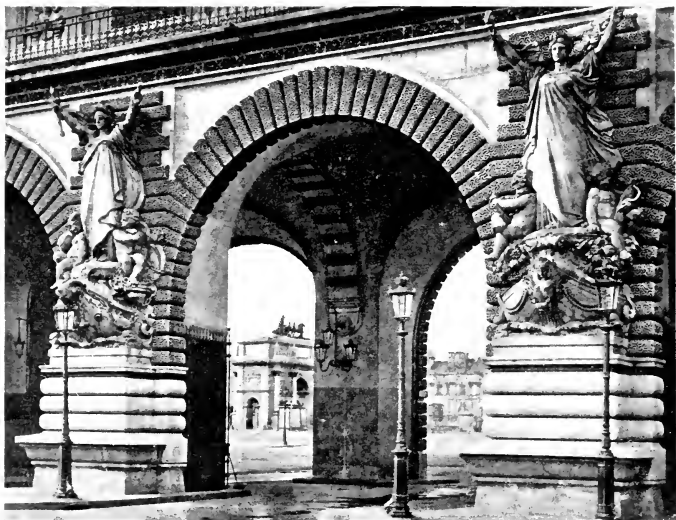
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would ever be so foolish as to stem this current for a bite at a stale worm?

As the three students reached the opposite bank, they turned to the old book boxes ranged along the stone parapets as naturally as ducks turn to water.

The painter collects instinctively. He may live in a tiny attic room at ten francs a month, but there you will find him surrounded by scraps of ancient tapestries, bits of old brass, curious old leather bound books, stray plates from rare editions on costume, ornament, architecture, the latter bought for a few centimes at these very book stalls.

The mode of attack reveals the man. Ben unearthed a copy of Emerson's Essays and quickly was lost to the outside world. Felix dipped into the boxes in a desultory way laughing aloud at the caricatures in a pile of comic journals. He fiercely attacked a pile of anatomy plates fully intending to buy a score, but ended by throwing them into a corner as he leaned over the stone parapet to watch the amateur fishermen who had ceased their angling and were grouped about some object of common interest. Boschet was rummaging through a pile of *brochures*. "Aha!" he cries, his face lighting with cunning mischief. "Here is a copy of 'The Ecstasist.' *Mon Dieu!* but Duchâtel is an *imbécile!* Listen Felix!" and he reads aloud with mock seriousness—"The Ecstasists are a school of painters far in advance of their times. The painter of the future will, like the Ecstasists, paint without models——"



“ Under the great arch-ways.”



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"Without models!" Felix broke in with a cry of derision. "Poor fool of a Duchâtel! As soon expect us to paint without eyes!"

"The French School" continued Boschet "grovels in gross sensualism—the slave of models gathered from the pavements and brothels of Paris. Rot! Rot! Rot!" Boschet emphasized each repetition of the English slang word with a vicious tear at the offensive sheet.

"*Va!*" He cast the fragments riverwards. The March wind swept them down to the lower quay where they were caught in the wheels of a black painted push cart which was being trundled towards the group of fishermen.

The group parted as the cart drew near and the students saw them load on its grewsome freight.

"Another suicide! Most likely an Ecstasist!" Boschet laughed ironically.

"Who is it?" He accosted a fisherman who approached, reeling up his line as he walked. The man greeted his question with a conscienceless smile. "Nobody in particular! Only another *imbécile* painter. They called him Du—Du—Duchâtel."

"Duchâtel?" The three men uttered the name in unison as they looked into one another's faces.

Felix paled. Even Boschet cast a guilty look at the push cart as it passed them but he shrugged his shoulders as he paid the book vendor for the destroyed copy of "The Ecstasist" and muttered "*Enfin*—what is to be expected of one who scorns realism, truth, the very

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foundation of our great academy, the model? What is to be expected of an emasculated art?"

Then with the volatility of his race he smiled as they turned from the quay into the Rue de Seine. "A happy thought! *Allons mes amis!* To the Café des Ecoles! Let us drink to our *confrères* the models!"

Chapter V

“GOOD-BY, old man! *Amusez vous bien!*” Ben stood in the doorway of the studio, dress suit case in hand. It was the *Mardi-Gras*, and he had been invited to a house party at Fontainebleau. Although they had been nearly two years in Paris, he had only just presented the letter of introduction which brought about this invitation.

Felix looked up from his easel over by the window, his face rather drawn and tired. “Yes; I shall have a right good time, a sure enough frolic; I shall dine at Mootz’s to-night.”

Dining at Mootz’s suggested so many convivial things that Ben gave a significant chuckle and calling another good-by, slammed the door. Felix worked as an artist works when he sees his ideals gradually taking form. To be sure it was only an *ébauche*, a mere sketch of what he hoped to do later on with the aid of a model. The silence of the studio was only broken by his deep breathing or his foot falls as he occasionally walked back to regard his work at a distance.

Strange noises came up from the street below. The blast of tin trumpets, noisy kazoos, boisterous shouts, and occasionally the call of a melodious hunting horn. He had totally forgotten that it was the *Mardi-Gras*.

At last the light began to fade and Felix reluctantly laid aside his palette with a long, deep sigh. He mechanically rolled and lighted a cigarette and stepped

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out on the balcony. For months he had carried about in his mind a Psyche of such purity that he had searched all Paris in vain for a model. As he sat on the iron railing gazing off into space he could trace her oval face with the star-like eyes looking into his. Ah, yes; he must search and search until he found the right model. As he fell to pacing the balcony a reaction set in and then a look of secret dread which Ben had often noticed passed across his sensitive face. Would he be able to finish it after all?

From below, echoing across the canal came a rollicking, familiar song of the atelier. Felix's face brightened and his whole being seemed to catch the rhythm of the somewhat diabolical refrain.

He had come to love these happy-go-lucky classmates. He never thought of himself or his fears when in their company. All the sunlight of his southern nature shone forth when brought out by their companionship. The students down below were waving, motioning him to come. He seized his hat and cane and sprang down the stairs two at a time, singing the atelier refrain as he went.

The spell of the carnival was in the air. Hoodlums in grotesque attire were skylarking on the pavements, but it was only a foretaste of what followed when daylight fled.

The day was warm. There was a touch of spring in the air, that magic touch which transforms Paris from a damp, draughty, comfortless city into a budding paradise bathed in seductive sunlight. So it seemed to Felix



Felix Braxton.

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as he sauntered along the Boulevard with his fellow students. The freedom of this out-of-door life was doubly intoxicating to one born in a southern climate. This delicious lazy feeling of irresponsibility always acted as a panacea to his responsive, sensuous temperament.

All Paris was out of doors. The little tables before the cafés were crowded with merry-makers. Now and then Felix and his friends would stop to banter a party of students. As they approached the Café Voltaire, an entire company of students rose to their feet and uncovering their heads cried with great gusto—“*Vive le Prince de Galles!*”

One of Felix's company whom the students had dubbed the Prince of Wales because of his strong resemblance to the Prince, lifted his hat with mock dignity bowing to right and left, but suddenly a number of French students from the Academy of Medicine over the way cried “*A bas les Anglais!*” and attacked the English group with canes and chairs. The Prince of Wales however, whose feats as a boxer are still talked of at Julian's, quickly routed the enemy and before the infuriated waiters had righted their chairs and tables, the Prince and his followers had disappeared into the Rue de Seine and from thence into the Rue de Buci.

They stopped before a door over which hung a transparency which read—“*The American's Rendezvous! Kept by M. Mootz.*”

Barely within the door they were again attacked. Felix was seized and borne aloft upon the shoulders of

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his comrades, up and down the room to cries of "*Vive Felix! V-i-v-e F-e-l-i-x!*"

"What is this all about?" cried Felix, as soon as his voice could be heard.

"Why, bless your heart, old boy," cried "Stumpy" of St. Louis, "you have won another *concour*! Now, boys! Who is Felix Braxton?"

The American's Rendezvous fairly trembled as they shouted in unison,

"First in war!

"First in peace!

"First in all the *concours*

"At Ju-li-an's!"

The spirit of the Carnival was at Mootz's that night. The long, tunnel-like room was filled with students of all nationalities. Their shouts and songs reverberated between the smoky walls, but above the din could be heard the clarion voice of Monsieur Mootz, calling orders from a platform where he sat corpulent and florid, like Bacchus enthroned.

Two waiters scampered about, also calling orders and serving customers. At the furthest end of the room a vista of copper pans could be seen through a haze of fatty vapor and tobacco smoke. Here the cook was hard at work echoing orders in stentorian tones.

Mootz was a prime favorite with the students, not only because he allowed them almost unlimited credit, but singular to relate, he had commanded a company of

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volunteers in the Franco-Prussian War in which their great master Rován had been a private.

The students had naturally promoted him to a generalship, but he never resented this, and would always answer their salute of "*Bonjour Monsieur le Général!*" with "*Bonjour mes camarades!*"

He had been forced to take many a painting in payment for dinners which had gone the way all good things go with half-starved students, and the dingy walls were lined with canvases of all sizes and shapes, some bearing the names of men already great in the art world, while others were grotesque caricatures of students who frequented the place.

The spontaneous piece of horse play which the entrance of Felix had provoked, evidenced how the young Virginian's joyous nature had won the good will of his fellow students.

He had worked with feverish, tireless energy which his more sedate companions said would burn out his life if he did not spare himself. He had appeared at Julian's unknown, a stranger to all, to become in a few months the most popular American and brilliant worker in the class.

Felix found the ovation at Mootz's almost as intoxicating as the bad wine which Mootz opened in his honor. Is it to be wondered that his spirits burst their bonds in wild, hilarious song, his comrades joining in until the clarion voice of General Mootz was lost in the tumult?

Yes; the spirit of the Carnival was abroad at Mootz's

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that night. They sallied forth like all the world on mischief bent, the whole of Paris their hunting ground. Like the Indians on their native plains they marched in Indian file disguised in leering masks and outlandish noses.

Many an American tourist was startled into a surprised state of patriotism when he heard the stirring refrain of "Marching through Georgia" come up to him from the surging crowd below.

In and out, like a huge, restless reptile, the Indian file wound its way through the crowds of masqueraders, halting only for refreshments, which was far too often, or to join other masqueraders in a wild reel upon the smooth asphalt. It was very late when the blazing lights of the Students' Ball appeared ahead.

With riotous shouts they plunged into the vortex of frenzied revelry. A noisy band was playing a maddening air of the quarter. Through the heavy pall of tobacco smoke "*La Goulou*" could be seen dancing a grotesque figure with her cadaverous, loose-jointed partner from the Exterior Boulevard.

Suddenly a savage yell rent the air and there was a rush to the center of the hall. An Indian chief in war paint and feathers was performing a wild war dance, while about him whirled a huge circle of American students. Two or three cow-boys, some more Indians, and a number of models joined them.

With terrific momentum, the nondescript ring of dancers spun about the hall. The Americans had taken



"The spirit of the Carnival was abroad."

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the floor by force, much to their delight, but they had provoked the ire of the burly floor manager who sallied forth to break the ring.

Staggering with the vertigo of motion, Felix felt a hand at his coat collar and found himself curveting off at a tangent.

His head struck something hard; there was the crash of an overturned table and broken glass, then he heard and saw nothing for an instant.

When he scrambled to his feet the scene swam before him. The familiar voice of a woman accosted him in bantering tones "O ho; Felix my boy! You have spilled our beer and must make it good!"

But Felix never answered. He stood with his eyes riveted upon her companion.

"How strange!" he muttered, "marvelous!" He had searched all Paris for weeks for his own particular Psyche, and to-night in the midst of this pandemonium he finds himself at her feet, while she looks shyly out at him with frightened eyes.

She is dressed as a Norman peasant and sits beside Octavie the model who has posed for a half score of Venuses, two of which are in the Luxembourg.

"*Voyons* Felix!" cried Octavie—"You are very polite! Why do you stare a shy country girl out of countenance? Ho; Garçon! More beer! *Eh bien* Felix, how do you like me as Columbine?"

"Charming! But I have always found you more ravishing as Venus!" cried Felix with a merry laugh

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as he righted the table and chairs. "But you too, are impolite Octavie! May I not know your friend?"

"Ah yes;" exclaimed Octavie apologetically, "my cousin has come from Rouen to pose. Lili! this is Monsieur Felix, the distinguished American painter!"

Lili's dark fringed, lustrous eyes had rested upon Felix with half frightened admiration from that first moment when he came crashing headlong within their line of vision.

He took her proffered hand in his and raised it to his lips with an undefinable grace. She thought him a god.

Still retaining her hand in his nervous grasp, his ardent eyes met hers. The dark lashes fell, but not until the brown orbs had flashed back an answer that made the blood course madly through his veins.

The air pulsated with the fever of an inviting waltz. Yielding to an uncontrollable impulse he quickly drew her to him and they whirled away into the sea of frantic dancers.

On they sped, round and round the great hall. Suddenly she uttered a cry of pain and clung closely to Felix. A hulking fellow in *sabots* had stepped on her foot.

Lifting her lightly in his arms he carried her to one of the little arbors in the garden where it was dusky and cool.

As he tried to place her upon the bench beside him, her arm closed tight and warm about his neck. For an instant he sensed her throbbing heart against his own.

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He felt her warm breath as she nestled in his neck, then he drew her face up to his. It flushed pink again.

“Lili, I love you!” he whispered.

Her half closed eyes were swimming. “And you, Monsieur, I adore!” she murmured passionately.

Chapter VI

“**W**HERE have I seen you before?”

“Think hard and see if you can’t remember!” said Ben Cushing to the pretty widow beside him.

She pressed a forefinger to her temple with a puzzled look. “Ah!” she cried, “Now I remember! On board the *Champagne* of course!”

It required quite a piece of mental conjuring to juggle a man from the steerage of the *Champagne* to the top of this smartly equipped coach which was bowling along through the Forest of Fontainebleau and Ben looked entirely at home there in his stylish English suit and silk hat.

“But what in heaven’s name possessed you to cross in that way?” asked Mrs. Van Kleer in amazement.

“Devotion to my art and a very dear friend who couldn’t afford to come any other way. Neither could I for that matter. You see my father absolutely refused to make an artist of me, so I took matters into my own hands.”

“Ugh! how horrid it must have been. Ah yes; I do remember your friend, he saved Miss Durlan’s tam-o-shanter from a watery grave—poor Alina; I wonder where she is now.”

“I saw her only yesterday copying in the Louvre.”

“I hope she was in good company,” said the widow with emphasis.



Fontainebleau.



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"In good company?" wonderingly.

"Yes; you know one night this winter my brother and I were driving home from the Opera. There was a blockade; we were wedged in close to the pavement. I was nervous and wanted to get out, so my brother tried to amuse me by calling my attention to the people sitting about the café tables and would you believe it, the first person I beheld was Miss Durlan at a table in the full glare of the electric light with—with a—well he might have been an organ grinder or a——" She hesitated for lack of a word strong enough to express her disgust.

"An artist!" suggested Ben with suppressed merriment.

Ben found the house party at Fontainebleau so entertaining, that before he was aware of it he had whiled away nearly two weeks. What wonder in the midst of the great historic forest, each gnarled oak of which could whisper legends of the hunt, the fleeing stag and wild boar.

Whenever an opportunity presented itself he would mount one of his host's thoroughbreds for a brisk canter over to Barbizon where he spent an occasional hour with the artists at Siron's.

On the last of these occasions a man just down from Paris told him that his portrait of Felix had been accepted at the Salon. When he galloped back to tell his friends of his good fortune, he found the official notification awaiting him, also a telegram from his parents who were in London.

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"How strange," he mused as he read the dispatch asking him to meet his father in Paris the next night. "He crosses the Atlantic to win me away from my art, and here by the same delivery is something that I can wave before his dear old eyes. He is a business man and wants cold hard facts. Well here they are."

He stored the precious document away in his pocket for further use and sent a few lines to Felix explaining his prolonged absence, and asked him to send a satchel of clothing over to the Continental Hotel, as he would probably be detained there several days, possibly a week.

Upon arriving in Paris Ben found his parents on tour-bent with the itinerary of a month in Italy all mapped out.

There was much shopping and sight seeing to be attended to before leaving and a week passed before he had an hour at his disposal.

He hailed a passing cab and drove to the Quai St. Michel, hoping to find Felix at home, but in this he was disappointed. However, Madame Papillon handed him the pass key and he climbed the stairs humming a familiar air.

"Ah;" he thought. "Now for a good smoke in the dear old place."

As he entered the studio the glare of the window at first blinded him. He started for his pipe rack, but halted with a jerk—"Great Scott!" he uttered vehemently as he shaded his eyes to make sure that he was not mistaken.

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No; it is not the same old place by any means. Something has happened in his absence. His eyes wander wonderingly over the room. He shakes his head, heaves a long sigh and starts again for his pipe rack. His foot strikes something. He stoops to pick it up and holds it somewhat gingerly between his fingers with an odd, amused expression. A woman's shoe; a dainty Louis Quinze affair with arching instep and high heel. He places it upon a shelf hard by, and jamming a wad of tobacco fiercely into his pipe mutters under his breath—"Poor Felix!"

When the dense cloud of smoke caused by rapid and continuous puffing had cleared away, he turned to go out on the balcony. He and Felix had solved many hard problems out there. His steps were however again arrested.

Face to the wall was Felix's easel and on it a large canvas. Yielding to impulse he crossed the room and wheeled it into the light. "Ah! Felix has found his Psyche at last."

Only the head and shoulders were finished; the youthful, nude figure and leafy background were merely suggested in charcoal.

He stood for a long time motionless. Here was the Psyche which Felix had so often described to him as they smoked their pipes in the gloaming.

He continued to stand, held by the marvelous beauty of eyes in which glowed the light of love.

"Great Heavens!" he thought as he turned the easel to the wall "If I could only paint like that."

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He stepped out on the balcony and paced back and forth in the sunlight pulling away at his briarwood. He was trying to settle a problem which would not have been possible a year ago—or two weeks ago.

Would the end—in Felix's case—justify the means? Must he destroy this day dream of Felix's? That was the problem.

The grand beginning of the painting inside had completely overwhelmed him. As he drank in the beautiful message of the canvas he found himself thinking "Had any man the right to break the spell that was giving the world such a master-piece?"

"No!" he ejaculated as he entered the studio and picked up his hat—"I can't—at least not to-day—I will write him from Italy."

Chapter VII

“**M**Y dear old Ben: Your letter offended me. I thought it hypocritical, unsympathetic, grandfatherly. I was in a rage. You have seen me in that state of mind so often that I will not use up paper and ink describing it.

Your argument is all wrong. In the first place I never in my life lived until now. The life now linked with mine makes living possible.

In the second place I never painted until now. You admitted as much in your letter.

Your point of view is all wrong. You seem to think that I am going the way of all those licentious fellows of the Quarter—that the end will be as you say it always is.

Ah, old man; you don't know what true happiness means. You don't know what it is to have your cares swept away in an instant by the soft, sweet touch of loving lips. At work or at play to have a pair of longing trustful eyes ever looking into yours. I shudder at the barrenness of my life before she came to me.

The touch of Lili's fingers transforms everything that they come in contact with. There are curtains and plants in the little bed room window now, and a canary singing merrily on the balcony.

If you could see the pretty little dinners that Lili and I have out on the balcony, with Lili in her pretty pink gown (which she made herself) making salad and daintily

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biting off a bit with her pearl white teeth to see if it were all right, you would pronounce Venice, Florence and the rest *banal* and uninteresting.

And now I will tell you why you are all wrong in your premises. Lili is my wife. To be sure we have not gone through the usual forms, but the solemn covenant of eternal union was made one lovely day under a big spreading oak tree in the woods at Versailles and she now wears my plain gold ring, the one I always wore.

Do you remember those dark days, those awful misgivings which so often haunted me? They have not been possible since Lili came into my life. No! I shall not return to America until my affairs enable me to take Lili there as my lawful wife. When the scholarship expires I shall eke out an existence somehow. It will be easy with Lili always beside me. I am lonely this afternoon; she has gone for a few hours to visit an aunt at Auteuil. That aunt is my *bête noir*, she keeps Lili there far too many hours, but Lili says that when the old lady dies she will bequeath all to her, so I bear it for Lili's sake.

Ah; old boy you can never know how it is until you have loved.

When do you return to Paris? Come to the old home when you do and see how it is changed. In the meantime don't be hard on your old chum.

FELIX."

It was sundown on the lagoon. The sound of bells stole musically across the wide, glassy surface of the

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water. The tolling of the bells of big campaniles, the constant tinkling of far away church bells in distant towers seemed to burden the air with melody.

The letter was opened at an opportune moment. Felix himself could not have chosen a better time. A gentle swell rocked the gondola. The bells ceased ringing and now and then a few bars of a passionate old Italian love song was wafted over the lagoon by a lazy little breeze which fanned Ben's cheek. He sat for a long time in a brown study, the open letter still in his hand; then he bade the gondolier row him far out into the Adriatic, where he drifted he never knew how long, trying to settle that question for Felix. It had confronted him when he first saw the Psyche. It still perplexed him "Would the end justify the means?"

Felix had said that he—Ben—had never loved, that he was incapable of judging——"

"Antonio!" His gondolier's cigarette fell into the sea with a sharp hiss, so suddenly had his voice broken the stillness of sundown.

"*Si Signor!*" The voice was deep, musical, vibrative.

"Are you married Antonio?"

"Not yet Signor."

"But I heard you speak of your *bambino* only yesterday."

"True, Signor; and a happy home it is. Maria has been true to me for three years and we shall be married some day."

"Ah—then you love your—wife and boy?"

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"*Si Signor*; as I love the Holy Virgin and Infant Jesus!"

"Then you will be happy if you—marry."

"Happy?" There was a rich flush upon the gondolier's bronzed cheek. His melodious laugh rang over the water—"Happy Signor? The Princes of India are not happier than Antonio and Maria and little Tinto!"

"Ah—I am glad!" Ben gave a sigh of relief. "To the hotel Antonio! The short route!"

Then the thing was possible. Felix's way might be a good way after all. He put the letter in his pocket and, although quite unconscious of the fact, hummed an air of the town, keeping time with Antonio's vigorous strokes.

The gondolier was pushing through a network of back canals. The way was narrow and tortuous. It was the quarter of the poor of Venice.

Ben missed the fresh air of the sea. The teeming population oppressed him. Once he cast his eyes upwards to the top story of a crumbling old palace, now an humble abode of the poor.

A handsome young woman with a wealth of Titian hair was waving at him. No! Surely not at him! He looked again. A little baby boy in her arms was throwing kisses.

"*Tinto mio! Maria mia!*" Antonio's voice echoed loudly between the high walls.

"Look! Look! Signor. There they are! My lovely Maria and my little Tinto! Are they not beautiful? Why need you ask if I am happy?"

All was somber below. A single shaft of sunlight



“The gondolier was pushing through a network of
canals.”



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illuminated the little balcony. The mother's head seemed crowned with a nimbus of shimmering gold.

Ben never forgot that picture. He never was able to separate it from the problem of Felix's life.

As Antonio swung the gondola about a corner, they both waved to the two figures on the balcony and Ben once more absently hummed the song of the town but as he bade Antonio "good night" and ascended to his room he found himself murmuring—"Poor, dear, old Felix!"

* * * * *

When Ben arrived in Paris, his first thought after settling his parents at the Continental was to see Felix and the woman who held his destiny in her hands.

After all, he thought as he crossed the Pont St. Michel and turned into the quay of the same name, Felix's case may be an exception to the rule and being settled in life may be the making of the man—then that glorious canvas will atone for all. Yes; the end must justify the means.

Madame Papillon greeted him with the information that both Monsieur and Madame Felix were out, so he took the key and climbed the long, winding stairs.

He knocked as a precautionary measure; she might be in. There was no response, so he turned the key and opened the door.

Yes; he found everything as Felix had described it in his glowing letter. The cold gray place had become a warm, bright home. The canary was singing merrily

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on the balcony. The little bed room with its bright tiny window garden; the cupboard and dining table all set in the studio.

"Dear old Felix!" he murmured. "He never did things just like the rest of us and his way of settling himself for life may be best after all." Somehow Ben felt guilty of house breaking as he touched the bits of feminine wearing apparel hanging from the nails where his tweed suits used to hang.

As he went on hunting for his patent leathers, his walking sticks and umbrella which had been hidden away in corners beneath and behind things, the feeling that he was an intruder and ought not to be there, troubled him more and more until he finally gathered up his belongings and started for the door only to stop again. The Psyche; how foolish of him to have forgotten her.

There was the canvas with its face turned to the wall as he had left it on his last visit. He put down his packages and swung the easel about so that the full light struck the canvas. He gazed long in amazed disappointment. It had not been touched since his last visit. He again remarked that the nude, girlish figure was but faintly indicated in charcoal. Again the marvelous beauty of that wonderful head with its lustrous loving eyes, enthralled him. All that was pure and noble in his nature was awakened. For the first time in his life a strange yearning seized him; a feeling that Felix possessed something more than he. Was he ever to look into such a face and call it his own?

There was a step outside. The door opened.

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"Felix!" He was startled at what at first seemed an apparition, so wan and troubled did his friend appear. The cold, bluish light of the great studio window exaggerated the unusual pallor of his face.

He greeted Ben heartily, but hurriedly, with much of the old time ardor, but he seemed possessed for the moment with but one idea, his eyes wore a frightened look. He brushed past Ben and crossing the room turned the canvas face to the wall.

As Ben tried to utter a little speech on the pleasures of having a home, Felix wheeled about waving him off with a nervous gesture at the same time sweeping his left hand across his eyes, a movement which Ben knew meant agony of mind.

"No! No!" he cried quickly "not now! I can't stand it!" He started to cross the room, but turned suddenly and putting his two hands upon Ben's shoulders said with lowered eyes, a quaver in his voice—"I am in trouble old man! Won't you help me?" Help him? Had Ben seen that head of flaxen hair in a sea of fire he would have gone to him.

Felix seated himself upon a stool by the table where he remained in silence for some moments, his face pallid and suffering.

"She is gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes; gone!"

Felix's voice broke and his face sank into his arms. A tiny café-noir cup—hers, fell to the floor with a sharp ringing crash.

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Ben relapsed into silence and filling his pipe went out on the balcony where he paced up and down smoking furiously.

After a little Felix joined him as Ben knew he would, and told him all. How her visits to her aunt had become more and more frequent. How he had spent that first lonely night when she failed to come home, walking the streets of Auteuil and in the gray dawn going to the morgue fearing lest she might have met with some dreadful accident. Now a week had passed and she had not returned.

"I can't eat—I can't sleep! This place is a hell to me by night!"

Felix shivered, there was a wild look in his eyes which Ben did not like. He placed a firm hand upon Felix's shoulder. "Come; come; old man! You always excite yourself too much over things. Give her the benefit of the doubt. That aunt of hers may have spirited her away when she found that you were not a rich American. Confound them! You have only to say 'I am an American' and the beating process begins. To them we are all millionaires. I will bet you that I have hit upon the cause of all the trouble. Now cheer up! I am coming back to-night to live with you awhile. To-morrow I will take you out to the Tennis Club where it is cool and quiet and by that time you will be in decent form to talk it over rationally. In the meantime you must have a long night's sleep. Will you try?"

"Yes old man; I will try."

When Felix awoke the next morning there was a genu-

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ine ring of hope in his voice. Ben's healthy view of the situation had given him a night's rest, the first for many days.

The offer of green trees, mossy banks, some cool spot where he could think and talk reasonably was grateful.

They locked up the studio and climbed to the top of a Porte Maillot omnibus.

How they had learned to love these huge omnibuses with their massive gray horses driven as the Roman charioteers drove, three abreast. Often when inspiration was at a low ebb, they had cast aside the tools of their profession and had ridden on the upper decks of these ships of the thoroughfares.

As they ploughed through the sea of teeming life, the petty difficulties of their work would be forgotten and they would view life in a broader more generous way.

Faces would come up to them from the crowds on the pavements, from the windows of the *entresols*, from the tops of passing omnibuses; faces that in one fleeting glance would reveal romances, tragedies, poems.

One day as the omnibus on which they rode pulled up at St. Philippe de Roule, there came out of the gray, damp fog, a rugged, Titanic face; deep furrowed, grandly melancholy.

Felix caught Ben by the arm. "See!" he uttered in an awed whisper.

"Yes; I see him!" There was deep reverence in Ben's tones.

Only an old man gazing intently downwards from the roof of a passing omnibus, yet the other faces became

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as putty or wood or the mist itself, such was the power of this gigantic personality.

As the omnibus moved off and the massive, thoughtful face was lost in the mists, Felix seemed to hear the droning of bees and locusts as he lay beneath the rhododendron bushes on the old Virginia plantation, reading "*Les Misérables*" and "The Toilers of the Sea."

This happened in the early days of their Parisian life, before Felix had fallen into the ways of the Quarter; before the narcotic "truths" of an absinthe inspired school had made havoc with his pet theories.

He scoffs at Victor Hugo now. He is proud of the fact that he often dines only two tables from Guy de Maupassant at the Café of the Dead Rat, and that he has actually shaken Zola's hand at Guiliamet's studio.

He also speaks proudly of being one of a crowd of advanced thinkers over whom Rouvier presides, whose bi-weekly orgies at the Café des Écoles are the talk of the Quarter. Yes; he even helped drag the butcher's cart on the night of Duchâtel's chastisement.

Even at this moment with an untold dread lurking in his eyes he enters a protest as Ben condemns Willette's cartoons at the Chat Noir where they had dined only the night before. Ben was glad. Anything to make Felix forget his troubles.

The sunny June morning was but half spent when they stood on the high river bank at Courbevoi hailing a boatman.

The Tennis Club was the sole possessor of a green island covered with a luxuriant growth of poplars and

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willows. Almost hidden by verdure was the little *châlet* which served as a club house. Through the openings in the trees they could see the courts and white coats of the players.

At this point the Seine becomes two streams. To the north of the island it flows sluggishly beneath overhanging willows, to the lock of Suresnes. On the other side it swirls and eddies along its own free way.

The change of air, a sharp walk around the island followed by a shower bath did much for Felix as Ben had said it would.

After lunch the two friends lighted their pipes and strolled to a quiet grassy slope almost hidden from the outside world by masses of transparent foliage through which the warm June sunlight streamed. The river's lazy current rose and fell upon the pebbly beach at their feet. Ben was sprawled flat on his back. A drowsiness which he could not resist overcame him—his eyelids closed.

Felix sat half reclining against a great tree trunk, his troubled gaze wistfully searching the vista of stream and bank. The sight of the river recalled the early days of his union with Lili. How they had drifted down this same stream in the mystic moonlight. How his senses quivered in a delirium of joy as he held her in his close embrace. How the burning passion of her love seemed to all but choke her as she tried to speak. The moist, languid lids and dark sweeping lashes half veiled eyes which swam with the intoxication of love—he rudely closed them with a torrent of kisses.

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Felix sprang to his feet with a quick impatient cry which startled Ben from his siesta—"Something must be done! Now! To-day!"

"Just so; old man." said Ben, as he calmly filled his pipe.

He seized Felix by his shoulders and pushed him back to his seat against the tree.

"Sit down until I tell you something. I take it all back—I mean what I wrote you from Italy. I am sure now that you did the right thing. To be sure you did it in your own confounded rattlebrain way, but you love the little woman and I want to see you as happy as a king. As to the girl, I tell you she is true or those eyes speak falsely. Do something? Confound it! We will find her if it takes all summer, in spite of the avaricious aunt."

Ben's voice had a peculiarly soothing cadence as he went on.

"When I saw the old studio yesterday I felt strangely. I never believed before that I could have such feelings. I felt like a lonely wanderer on the face of the earth. I found myself thinking that you had everything and I—nothing."

In the pause which followed, the distant sounds of the river life were almost drowned by the buzzing of a swarm of flies which moved in a circle above their heads. A boat came drifting along beneath the canopy of green leaves. As it drew nearer the low, seductive, half smothered laugh of a woman was wafted to them on the hot June air.

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The boat crossed the vista, the oars were trailing in the river grass. They heard the same low laugh again. A pair of pearl white arms were thrown about the rower's neck.

Both men smiled as Ben whispered "By Gad! It is little Boschet! How we will guy him!" His face suddenly blanched as he sprang to his feet—"Great Heavens Felix! What are you doing?"

Felix reached the bank in three bounds. "*Lili! Lili! O my God!*" His cry of agony rang out over the water but before its echo came back from the opposite shore he fell face down in the rushes, his left hand clutching at his heart, his right fumbling with something in his pocket.

As Ben tenderly carried his unconscious friend to the bank, a revolver fell from Felix's hand and rolled down the slope.

Ben turned as it tumbled into the stream with a splash. "That was for the aunt at Auteuil!" he muttered with a grim smile.

He rapidly set about restoring his friend to consciousness. Once the sound of a woman's laugh was wafted to him from beyond the willows.

He shot a terrible glance in the direction of the sound. Then his good face softened as his eyes fell to the white upturned face with a look of tenderness, love and pity. The look of the great, pure, noble love that man bears for man.

* * * * *

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The affair on the river bank all but severed the strained cord that bound Felix to things mortal. His devoted friend was ever at his bedside. When the fever raged, when the torn and suffering heart all but ceased its throbbing and his life hung in the balance for days, Ben was always there—patient, affectionate, tender.

When the students who relieved Ben from time to time found it impossible to quiet Felix, they would call Ben in from the balcony where with his pipe he paced restlessly.

A few quiet words from the voice in which there was untold tenderness would cause the sufferer's head to sink back into the pillows with a sigh of contentment.

Ben came to know each arch and gargoyle on the wonderful façade of Notre Dame and ever afterwards a photograph or print of the cathedral were it ever so poor would serve to bring back vividly the days when he tramped and smoked and tried to map out a future for his friend.

He had a deep rooted conviction, it had been growing of late, that somewhere in his friend's subconscious mind an ever present fear of some impending danger was slowly but surely sapping out his life. These sudden failings of the heart action under stress of anger or fear as at the Tennis Club; suggestions gleaned from the sick man's ravings; his very joyousness which seemed to sweep everything before it when at its zenith, was at times more like an intoxication of the senses, a nervous exaltation which Ben noticed was nearly always succeeded by a bitter reaction.



"Ben came to know each arch and gargoyle on the wonderful façade of Notre Dame--"

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The doctor had said that on no account must Felix remain in Paris another winter. Open fields, fresh air, a complete change of scene would do more than aught else.

When Felix had grown strong enough, they began to cast about for some quiet spot in the country where they could settle down for a year.

Chapter VIII

ON a clear, spring day a coach was slowly making its way along the great National Route which follows the seaboard of Normandy. The dust-covered coach in question was of a dingy yellow color drawn by three hungry looking, white horses. The leader had a chime of bells suspended from his collar which jangled noisily as the diligence rumbled along.

Inside was a talkative company of peasants returning from a neighboring market town.

Outside were two passengers; a bloused peasant who chatted volubly with the driver in an unintelligible *patois*, and a young woman who sat upon the topmost seat, holding a Skye terrier which barked furiously at a savage looking shepherd dog guarding a flock of sheep in a neighboring field.

The faithful shepherd dog stopped his rhythmical trot for a moment to gaze at this impertinent stranger, when the sheep broke for a field of young wheat close by.

The shepherd uttered a weird cry and waved his staff. His dog scampered after the stray sheep with quick, wolfish barks and in a twinkling had them all back again.

"Jack you bad boy! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Here! Lie down!"

Jack had spoilt a beautiful picture for his mistress. The gaunt old shepherd clad in a great sheepskin cloak, his legs bound up in straw, with the sheep and landscape made a superb composition.

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While the clumsy diligence droned along, Alina Durlan found herself reviewing her first two years in Paris. She remembered that first day when she drove away from the St. Lazare Station into a world where she could come and go unquestioned as her fancy prompted.

The little home which she and a girl friend had made for themselves in a studio on the hillside of Montmartre was quite to her mind.

It was a narrow little street, steep and winding, which started not far from the great Boulevard des Batignolles and lost itself high up on the hill near the old red wind-mill.

A street made for artists this, with odd little gables, stairways, unexpected gardens and courtyards. In one of the latter Alina found some fine horses stabled. The kindly stableman, pleased at her genuine admiration for his noble beasts, bade her come and work in the stable yard whenever she chose. Here at odd times she painted her first Salon picture—three of her huge models resting at noon-day.

She worked for the most part with her friend at the Académie Julian in the Rue St. Denis. It was a long, hard pull up the hill after the day's work, but they were amply repaid in the extensive view which their little balcony afforded.

At night they could see the sparkling lights of the great, throbbing city and as the fog lifted in the morning, the towers of Notre Dame would steal through the river mists, while the gold dome of the Invalides glittered in the morning sun.

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Unlike most artists, she went to the Louvre very seldom, not because she did not love all that it contained, but possibly because she more often found herself loitering in the streets where she could study the action, bone and muscle of the superb horses in which Paris abounds.

Her only souvenir of the Louvre was a copy of Paul Potter's "White Horse" which she made when the noxious air of Julian's had become unbearable and it was too cold to work out of doors.

They now and then went to the *café chantants* frequented by the working people. Their protector on these occasions was a raven haired painter of Sicily who had a studio in their courtyard. Like Alina he was an animal painter and his devotion to her was like the dumb faithful devotion of a dog. Ragged in dress, he bore himself with the grace of a courtier, but there were times when her room-mate detected a quick flush on his cheek and a fiery glance beneath his dark brows which boded none too well for Alina. She was glad when she left Paris.

When the first warm spring days came, Alina found herself longing for the fields, the woods, the sheep on the plain, the plowing, sowing and reaping. Here was the world of her horses.

She knew that somewhere in Normandy, near the sea, Schock the great animal painter lived. She decided to live near him and work under his guidance. A fellow student who had worked under the great master provided Alina with a letter of introduction which she held

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tightly in her hand as the *diligence* thundered down into a valley.

"*Holà! Holà! Arrêtez!* Stop I say! Specie of a hog can't you stop?"

Alina looked over the side of the *diligence* to see from whence came this voice, faintly heard above the rasping of the brake and cries of the driver who found it hard to stop his team on the steep incline.

A tall old gentleman in corduroys and *béret* hurried from a by-road gesticulating emphatically.

As the driver brought his team to a standstill he pointed over his shoulder with his thumb, at the same time nodding as much as to say, "Yes; here she is, you see I have brought her!"

The recognition was instantaneous. She knew the Master's noble, leonine head so well, she had seen countless photographs in the shop windows of Paris. The wealth of white silken hair, the piercing eyes beneath shaggy brows, the Titianesque features and patriarch's beard.

He helped her down from her high perch and gave a few quick orders to the driver about her boxes, then as he lifted his *béret* and said "After you Mademoiselle!" she started up the lane. Schock was reading the letter of introduction.

"Our friend says fine things of you Mademoiselle!" There was a kindly look in his deep-set eyes. "But it is quite needless, I have seen your *toile* at the Salon. You are serious, I know we shall get on well together."

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The master detected the eagerness in her voice as she said—"So you do think I shall paint some day?"

"Yes; my child you will do well, very well." He always called her "my child" from that first day.

They followed the lane for some distance, occasional breaks in the high mossy banks revealing the quaint roofs and gables of the village of Bréport which extends along the narrow valley to the sea.

The afternoon sun sent great shafts of light through the poplars at their backs which illumined the gold weather-cock on the old Norman church and the sails of the little fishing fleet upon the beach.

The village itself lay in a purple mist. Lines of blue smoke curled upwards from many chimneys. She could hear the crude song of a cowboy driving his herd down the opposite slope.

At last he pushed open a latticed gate in a high stone wall and they entered a huge courtyard in the center of which was a stone well-house with a conical tiled roof, the home of a family of pigeons.

Beyond was an apple orchard and through its gnarled branches could be seen the warm gray walls of an old chateau. A number of thatched cottages and stable buildings were scattered about the court-yard. Alina noticed that the largest of these had great studio lights built into the roof and sides.

The Master suddenly clapped his hands and uttered a peculiar cry. In a twinkling the air about their heads was filled with fluttering wings. The doves fought with one



Mère Fouchet.



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another for the privilege of lighting on his head, arms and hands.

The courtyard reverberated with the deep baying of hounds and the piercing yelps of terriers, Jack's shrill little bark adding to the din. Dogs seemed to come from everywhere, and not dogs alone; strangely out of place in their midst ran a snow white cosset lamb bleating a welcome. A bay mare cantered from the direction of the stable followed by a tiny colt. Alina heard a hoarse croak above her head and an aged crow settled down upon Schock's shoulder. This was surely the home of an animal painter.

There were faces at the château windows. A group of bloused peasants watched them curiously. Several young women stood in the great doorway of the château.

They wore paint aprons. One of them carried a handful of soap and was washing a bunch of brushes. Alina had already guessed her nationality when the Master exclaimed in excellent English—"Miss Durlan you must know Miss Dorothy Dolchester of London—a fellow pupil!"

The English woman greeted her with a cold, colorless smile, but as they entered the great hall, five young women started forward.

The Master rapidly introduced them: M'lle Schovatsky of St. Petersburg; M'lle Topsue of Denmark; M'lles Chauvin, Blanc and Meunier of Paris. Their greeting was more cordial than the English woman's. Two of them had been in Alina's class at Julian's. M'lle Topsue praised her Salon picture.

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She seated herself near a sunlit window while the Master hurried off to find his housekeeper. Her eyes roved over the lofty, heavily beamed interior. She loved the atmosphere of the place. All about the walls were ranged the priceless souvenirs of the great man's life.

When Schock returned he found her standing before a fantastic sketch of a jagged, mediæval castle. She was reverently deciphering the bold, black quill strokes of the inscription :

"To the comrade of my youth whom I love with all my heart!

"Victor Hugo."

The Master looked over her shoulder in silence. There was a tender look in his eyes.

"We were students together!" he murmured.

"And does he ever come to Bréport?"

She turned upon him eagerly.

"Yes; my child, and you shall meet him—ah, but he is old—we shall not have him long!"

"To teach the art of being a grandfather!"

Alina heard a cold laugh at her elbow. She turned to meet Miss Dolchester's colorless, doubtful smile.

She was pleased when the Master broke in with—"The Château is full now, I am obliged to put you with the good Mère Fouchet. You will take your noon meal and dinner with us at the Chariot d'Or."

Mère Fouchet's thatched cottage was in a quiet, ferny lane, shaded by rows of Lombardy poplars. The door-

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yard was shielded from the road by a high hedge. In one corner was an old well house with thatched roof out of which red poppies and ferns grew rank. Before it, bucket in hand, the house cat purring against her faded blue apron, stood Mère Fouchet smiling a welcome from beneath her winged Normandy cap.

She led the way to a chamber with immaculate linen and floor of tile. A rose bush framed the window, the place was filled with the scent of tea roses. It was a room after her own heart.

"Mère Fouchet will be a mother to Mademoiselle!" exclaimed the Master as he turned to leave.

"That I will! All that I have is Mademoiselle's!" The time-seamed, honest face beamed with kindly intent. "Mademoiselle will find it dreary at this season. Later the Parisians come to bathe and Bréport is gay!"

Alina shook her head. "Parisians!" She uttered the word contemptuously. "You do not yet know me my little mother. I want no Parisians! I came here to be rid of them. I want to live like a peasant and wear *sabots* and paint—paint—if I could only paint all these beautiful things!"

Mère Fouchet's face hardened. "Ah my little one, would to God the Parisians had never come to Bréport, my little girl, my only grand-child might be with me. The *Bon Dieu* knows how carefully I guarded her, but she grew and grew and became a woman and beautiful. A Parisian artist—a devil—came here to paint. He told her she was beautiful. She posed for him in the garden, on the plain, on the beach—always posing. She was

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never happy unless with him. One morning I went to call her. Her bed had not been slept in. I have not seen her since. Mademoiselle I detest the Parisians!"

Mère Fouchet's chest heaved. A tear trickled down the wrinkled cheek.

"Ah Mademoiselle; it has been *si triste* without her! I am so glad to have you! No! No! I will never make a peasant of you. You are too much of a lady for that, but you shall learn to wear *sabots* and cook a *pot-au-feu* and toss a *crêpe*."

"You are a good little mother!" Alina seized a rough bony hand and patted it between her own. "We must go to the village the first thing in the morning and buy some *chaussons* and *sabots* and woolen stockings. I shall need them all if I paint out in the rain this summer."

Chapter IX

AT noon the artists were wont to turn their steps towards the Chariot d'Or for déjeuner. Schock wondered as he took his way down the lane to Madame Fouchet's *chaumière* why his new pupil already interested him so deeply.

"It is because she is serious," he was thinking. "She is honest, one knows that when she speaks, yet she need not speak, her eyes are enough. Ah; *Mon Dieu!* how unlike La Dolchester. One has the charm of unconscious seriousness, the other the seriousness of selfish egotism, yet they are both Anglo-Saxons."

The Master's reveries were suddenly checked by hoarse shrieks of laughter.

"*N'ayez pas peur! Marche naturellement!*" came from behind Mère Fouchet's hedge. It was intermingled with a clattering of wooden shoes and the shrill barks of a small dog. In the midst of the general din he could hear a nervous rippling laugh which stirred in him the spirit of youth. Curiosity getting the better of dignity he did not wait to gain the gate, but mounted a big stone and peered over the hedge.

"*Ah; bonjour mon enfant!* You are a true Norman—you wear wooden shoes."

Alina was ill-prepared for this interruption. She was gingerly crossing a pebbly walk, her cheeks were flushed. She brushed a stray, golden-brown strand from her eyes and turned to see from whence came the salutation. One

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of her *sabots* tilted over, she uttered the same nervous rippling laugh then vainly clutched at a bunch of tall red poppies and fell in the midst of Mère Fouchet's pea vines, looking charming in all her disorder. The Master broke through the hedge and came to her relief. He quickly stood her on her feet, and readjusting her *sabots* said—"You need your Master at all times you see. You must walk so—and so—and so!" He took three gliding steps something after the manner of a skater. "One retains the shoe all the time with one's toes my child. There! you are doing beautifully. You have quite the swing of a *paysanne* now. Mère Fouchet will never know your footsteps from Père Boudin's."

"*Parbleu!* If I couldn't do that I wouldn't be her little mother. Père Boudin can deliver the letters after a fashion but his bad cognac goes to his feet."

Schock laughed as he seated himself for a friendly chat with the old woman while Alina went indoors to change her *sabots* for a pair of golf shoes.

As she appeared in a short gray skirt and tam-o-shanter the Master exclaimed: "*Tiens! Tiens!* A new woman, but still beautiful—marvel upon marvels! They are usually so impossible Mademoiselle. *Enfin.* We must be off to *déjeuner.*"

The Chariot d'Or was an ancient structure of gray stone, and red brick of many shades. Its great courtyard had stabled the teams of the peasantry for many generations. Through its massive archway the old yellow diligence rumbled daily.

A vine-covered terrace extended along the front of the

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inn overlooking the entire market place, in the center of which was the Grain Hall. Beyond were the gray, mossy walls of the church of St. Martin.

As they were about to enter the inn, a young woman sipping coffee at a table on the terrace attracted their attention. She wore a broad brimmed, straw farm hat tilted back on her head and was smoking a cigarette. There was a "*fin de siècle*" air about her, an almost insolent indifference to people and things which Alina resented. It was not the cigarette, she had become used to seeing the girls smoke in the Quarter. Perhaps it was the cold, colorless face which just escaped being pretty, and the suggestion of a cynical smile always lurking about the thin lips.

"Ah! finished already Miss Dolchester?" said Schock doffing his *béret*. "Are you going to desert your Master? There was a time when you always lunched with me."

Miss Dolchester flicked the ashes off her cigarette with a doubtful smile. "When we see the *Maître* holding a young woman in his arms in the midst of sweet peas and poppies, we think it time to desert him."

The Master broke into a laugh. He turned to Alina. "You see we are discovered Mademoiselle. The *enfants* like to tease the old gray-beard, but I will have my revenge. *Nous verrons! Nous verrons!*" he shook his finger playfully at Miss Dolchester as they entered the inn.

The long, low dining room with its tiled floor, heavily beamed ceiling and row of sunlit windows had harbored a century of market day gatherings, where the cider of

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Normandy took the place of water and the rough songs of the peasantry reverberated between the walls.

It was a strangely mixed company that greeted Alina's shy glance as the Master placed her beside him at the head of the table.

The artists stopped a hot argument upon the merits of impressionism to greet the Master and new-comer cordially. Farmers in blouses were talking crops in hoarse tones. Two French pedlars were laughing boisterously at the jokes of a third party who might have been a clergyman but proved to be a traveling magician who was to perform in the market place that night.

At the opposite end of the table, separated from the other guests by some empty chairs sat a Frenchman of distinguished bearing, evidently of noble family. Beside him was a man whose jet black hair and graceful gestures suggested the Orient. He wore but one outside garment, a robe of maroon broadcloth.

A noble pair of shoulders and chest supported a still nobler head which, excepting the rather full lips and eyes might have been that of a Greek god.

He was talking with his companion in low tones quite unmindful of the noisy company in the midst of which the two seemed remarkably out of place.

Alina regarded them wonderingly.

"A fine head, is it not? It fascinates one. It is grandiose; but you must not eat cold soup," exclaimed Schock. "He is a Hindu priest and his neighbor is the Comte de Baigneur the famous *Sanskrit* scholar. The Swami Savitarka is to be the Count's guest at the Château



*“Where the cider of Normandy took the place
of water—”*

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de Silleron. Did you notice it the day you arrived? The diligence passes the great gate. Yes? A fine old estate. It has been in the family for centuries. A very old family the Count's—descended from one of the Conqueror's barons."

After they had reached the cheese and *confiture à groseille* they joined the artists outside upon the terrace, who were lounging upon benches, chairs, and tables in poses which suggested the inertia following a good meal washed down with good *ordinaire*. It was pleasing to see how quickly they hastened to bring a comfortable seat for the Master.

His protest that, if his hair was white he was still young and needed nothing more than the rest, was of no avail, so he settled himself comfortably in the arm chair which they provided saying—"If you will make a *vieillard* of me so be it *mes enfants*. But remember, when your hair becomes white like mine your art will still be young. It knows no restrictions."

"Restrictions!" broke in Miss Dolchester with an ironical smile, as she scratched a match on the sole of her heavy walking boot and lighted a fresh cigarette. "Restrictions don't pay in painting. Nothing—not even my conscience ever restricts my art. No, *parbleu*; a painter needs no conscience!"

The Master greeted Miss Dolchester's remarks with a prolonged "Ah!" in which there was an inflection of disapproval.

"Each must work out his salvation in his own particular way. That reminds me," he continued, with a mis-

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chievous twinkle in his eye. "Mademoiselle Durlan has her own original ways even when walking in *sabots*; we can only guess what she will paint when she gets to work."

The students were laughing. Alina's cheeks flushed pink. So Miss Dolchester has told them, she thought.

"If the Master guides me as well with my painting as he did with my *sabots* I shall do wonders," she replied.

"That you will! That you will!" said Schock in kindly tones.

Alina had found at an early stage of her studies that to be a painter of horses she must also paint all out-of-door nature. So when the party on the terrace broke up, she started off to reconnoitre the village. She would know each lane, farm, and hillock, as well as the great fertile plain above, before attacking anything serious.

Back of the one main street which was paved, she found such a maze of lanes and paths, all leading more or less directly to the plain, that her afternoon was well spent when she emerged from a picturesque farm yard on to a smooth, hard highway which descended abruptly village-wards.

Great pink clouds loomed up behind the poplars reminding her that the sunset hour was at hand. She climbed the high bank bordering the highway and threw herself down on the warm sod. She had reached the edge of the plain which stretched away to the blue sea.

The clumps of trees which showed the whereabouts of villages, were for all the world like oases in a vast fertile desert.

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She gave a deep drawn sigh of contentment. Not a jarring note in the whole expanse. Not even a barbed wire fence, wooden house or iron wind-mill. She clasped her hands about her knees and sat idly biting the end of a long straw, wondering why she had stayed so long in Paris. Then she stretched herself at full length and gazed up at the great mass of clouds and beyond into infinity.

Suddenly she started up with a fierce little scowl, all attention. She could hear a heavily laden cart moving slowly up the hill. The whip cuts and oaths of the driver grated upon her ear. Each cruel stroke went straight to her heart. She loved her dear horses, more than ever when weak and old. The most forlorn, jaded, broken-down horse that she had ever seen, staggered round the curve and came to a trembling halt. In an instant she was on her feet and hurrying down the bank.

The cart was piled high with wet sea-weed. On top sat the driver nursing his wrath with low guttural mutterings as he vainly tried to light a cheap cigar with a wet match.

Failing in this he vented his wrath on the poor beast. Blows rained thick and fast. Vile imprecations filled the air. The team was once more in motion, but only for a moment. Alina seized the horse's bit and brought him to a standstill.

"*Sacré nom de—*" The driver could hardly believe his eyes. The cart turned sharply on its two wheels and rolled into the gutter with a backward jolt that all but unseated him.

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A woman? By what right does she stop him? Weak miserables! Only fit to be beaten! With demoniacal fury the lash hissed through the air and left its trail of red on Alina's neck, but only once. A figure clambered up over the wheel and a firm hand wrenched the whip from his grasp.

"Fiend! Devil! Torturer!" The voice was resonant, terrible. The dark eyes that met his fearful glance seemed to burn his own shifting orbs in their sockets. And this red robe? It must be a priest! *Dieu me sauve!*" He rolled back upon the sea-weed in cowardly subjection.

The Hindu, glided down to the ground where he calmly waited beside the Comte de Baigneur who with his dusky companion had suddenly appeared by the roadside.

The Count frowned fiercely. "Holà Jacques Potin! Poltroon! Beater of women! Are you not contented with beating your own wife, that you must attack ladies on the National route? Down I say! Come down coward!"

As the scowling peasant slid down to earth, the Count caught him by the collar and pushed him towards Alina.

"Quick! On your knees I say and beg her pardon!"

Alina received the unwilling apology with set mouth and paled cheeks. Only by a quick fluttering of the eyelids, a sudden indrawing of the breath through her teeth, had she shown that she felt the peasant's whiplash. Now as they stood face to face, a sudden, unaccountable fear seized her. Where had she seen this face before?

Potin uttered a cry as the Count jerked him back-

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wards. His eyes started forward as from strangulation. The *Champagne*, the surging crowd of steerage passengers, two writhing bodies upon the deck—she saw it all again.

The Count was speaking. "A rare fellow to have on one's estate! Remember *imbécile* what I say—here—now! You vacate the farm in six months and furthermore you leave the village for good! Do you understand? Pitch off half of that sea-weed and come back for the rest in the morning."

They stood silently by while Potin doggedly obeyed his master. The old horse was once more headed up hill. Alina gave him a parting pat and rubbed her cheek against his nose. The creaking of the wheels broke the stillness of sundown.

The Hindu turned to Alina with a look of deep compassion. "Will you permit me to bandage your wound Mademoiselle? It must be painful." He spoke pure English.

After disarming the driver he had stood in silence, the picture of dignified composure, his arms folded across his wide chest, his nostrils slightly dilated.

He took her handkerchief and wetting it in a tiny brook by the roadside, with the aid of Alina's silk kerchief made a compress and fixed it skilfully in place.

The Count's courtly apology, made with all the grace of a French gentleman of the old school, brought the color back to the girl's cheeks. He stood with bared head, the embodiment of all that is refined, distinguished. "I am

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chagrined that Mademoiselle should have met such misfortune at the hands of one of my tenants. It was shocking—shocking!”

She laughed the idea to scorn. “Oh no! It was nothing. I took the risk. I always do when they beat the dear souls that way.”

A radiant smile lighted the Hindu's face. “Ah yes!” he murmured in deep tones. “They do not know that they have souls.”

Chapter X

ON a crisp, sunny morning some six months after her meeting with Jacques Potin, Alina started off to her work in her *sabots*, swinging along peasant fashion much to the delight of Mère Fouchet who had finally taught her how to wear them.

She was later than usual this morning, they had *crêpes* for breakfast and Mère Fouchet had spent much time trying to teach Alina how to toss them. The batter was poured into the pan, and, as the underside browned, Mère Fouchet would deftly lift it with a knife; then, by a clever jerk of the arm the cake would fly into the air and land in the pan, the uncooked side down.

Alina proved herself a poor house-wife from the Norman standpoint. Toss them she could, but land them in the right place, never. Each toss was followed by a hiss as the soft dough landed in the hot ashes.

At last Mère Fouchet said "Give me the pan, my child. I must cook the rest of the batter for breakfast. Never mind *ma chérie*, you will never have to marry a Norman, so it does not matter."

Two long stakes driven into the ground about two feet apart, marked the spot where Alina could be found at work any fine morning. The stakes served the purpose of an easel, the canvas being fastened to them with a stout cord.

Wherever one encountered these stakes, whether in unfrequented by-ways, vegetable gardens or woods, it

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was safe to surmise that at some hour of the day a painter would appear, unstrap his tools of trade, and relapse into that state of indifference to time and surroundings peculiar to artists.

It was a snug corner, this working place of Alina's, only a stone's throw from the scene of her encounter with Jacques Potin.

Hidden from the highway by a hedge of hawthorn she had a fine opportunity to study the subtle greens and distant purples of the great plain. In the immediate foreground was a plowed field where she would pose her horses.

She had a plowing motive in mind—a pair of her massive friends in full action dragging one of the crude, Norman plows with its pair of blue painted wheels. The plowman, rugged in form and color, a forceful contrast to sky and hazy distance. In the middle distance she could see the chapel spire of the château of the Comte de Baigneur and the long avenues of trees surrounding the massive pile.

This morning she kicked off her *sabots* as she reached the foot of the steep bank and climbed it in her noiseless *chaussons*. She hadn't time to make the usual detour and it would be impossible to climb it in her wooden shoes.

She stepped through the break in the hedge but stood transfixed as she uttered a startled "Oh!" whereupon two artists sprang up from their sketching stools in alarm, so suddenly had she come upon them. They all laughed nervously. One of the men approached with



The farm yard.

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uncovered head. "You must excuse us for taking your place—we never noticed your stakes!"

"O that is all right! There is room for us all—besides you once did me a service! Here it is—the same old tam-o-shanter!" She tore it off with a laugh and held it up. "Do you remember?"

"Ah yes, I remember!" Felix's pale face lighted with a rare smile.

"Oh!" broke in Ben. He plunged down into his inside pocket, "Mrs. Van Kleer—I met her at Fontainebleau! She gave me this letter of introduction in case——" He blushed slightly, "in case I found you."

"Found me?" She raised her arching brows in surprise. "Have you then been hunting long? How very strange!"

A crimson flush dyed Ben's neck and ears as he handed her the letter.

"Well—yes; I have been on your track for some time—a sort of private detective you know." He laughed. "I promised her that I would try to find you. She thought something had happened to you. She saw you with Scali one night and——"

"Poor Scali!" Alina smiled. "She *must* have been alarmed. His clothes, though, are the worst of him. He is the best copyist in the Louvre. I suppose I really treated her badly but you are both artists, you know how it is when one gets down to work? Excuse me!" She threw herself down upon a big bunch of dry grass and quickly scanned the letter.

The men resumed their sketching stools.

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She frowned. The dark, delicately-penciled brows contracted. The red lips pouted.

"Stupid! Stupid nonsense!" She tore up the letter and cast it aside. "I am so glad you have come!" The beautiful gray blue eyes gave them an honest welcome. "There are no men worth knowing here—I mean among the artists—only Schock. He is a dear though, you will love him."

"We didn't come to study with Schock," said Ben, "but we expect to have him look over our work now and then if he is willing—we are both figure painters."

"How delightful! Then you can criticize my plowman. I don't care that——" she snapped her fingers "for the criticisms of those girls!"

Both men looked towards her canvas which was lying face down.

"O no! That is only my *paysage*. I haven't even started him yet. I only work here mornings. Schock works us hard afternoons. He is putting us through a course in construction. We work from animals in the court-yard. I tell you Schock is great."

There was no work done that morning. The paint boxes, canvases and umbrellas were stowed away in the bushes and she took them prospecting for subjects. She knew every pool and mill-wheel, everything worth painting.

They found motives in an abundance. When they reached the edge of the village of Silleron, Felix threw himself down beneath a hedge and pulled a sketch book out of his pocket. He instantly became absorbed in jot-

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ting down with clever pencil strokes a scheme for an elaborate composition. So absorbed was he that he never heard an altercation which was taking place beyond the hedge. His companions heard it and curiosity impelled them to enter the garden by a gateway.

"So they have evictions here as well as in Ireland!" laughed Ben.

"I will have no criminals on my land I tell you! You are unfit for a kennel! You have violated your contract—Go!"

The Comte de Baigneur stood before the low doorway of a thatched farm house. Facing him, his clumsy arms gesticulating wildly, protestingly, was a peasant.

Close at hand there waited a two-wheeled cart loaded with household furniture and farm tools of the meanest description.

"*Nom d'un cochon!* A man may beat his own wife if he chooses! I am but a half year in arrears! Madame Tobin over yonder owes for two years! Curse the American hussy—she did it all!"

Jacques Potin picked up his whip and turned towards the cart, but stopped suddenly at sight of Alina. With a cry of rage he clutched the whip and made a savage lunge towards her. A firm hand seized the peasant's shoulder and whirled him about. "Go! I tell you!" The Count stood over him quivering with suppressed passion.

Ben was nonplussed. Where had he seen the peasant before? Alina's low frightened words set him right.

"He tried to kill him on the *Champagne!*" She

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jerked her head towards Felix. "They must not meet! Quick! He is coming! Stop him!"

Felix appeared in the gateway. "Oh Ben! Look here! Isn't this a fine lay out?" He held up his sketch book. "What is the row over there?" He tried to look through but Ben's broad shoulders filled the opening. "O nothing! Only an eviction. Yes; that is fine! How jolly those poplars will come against that bank of clouds. You must paint it some day."

Miss Durlan was right. Felix would be no match for the brute now. Ben turned in time to see the cart rumble out of the yard and to hear the Count's most courtly apologies.

"I crave your pardon, Mademoiselle, for this added insult. No! No! It was my fault, he was my tenant, but not now, thank God! He unfortunately goes only to the next village. I wish it were to China."

"Ignorance is the mother of all misery! He will have his hell!"

At the sound of the Swami's deep voice Felix turned in silent wonderment. The Hindu emerged from the doorway where he had been a witness of the eviction.

Chapter XI

“*T*IENS! Here come The Inseparables!” cried M’lle Chauvin.

“Yes, the villagers are already wagging their heads over them,” said Miss Dolchester with her cynical smile.

“They say she goes to their cottage alone,” exclaimed M’lle Blanc.

“Yes; but there is safety in numbers; they are three,” muttered Miss Dolchester.

Schock’s class sat on the terrace of the Chariot d’Or waiting for déjeuner. For some reason it was later than usual. The Master had not yet arrived. “The Inseparables,” as M’lle Chauvin chose to call them, were crossing the market place. Felix and Ben listened attentively. Alina walked between them. She was telling a story, one could see that it was about horses. She was driving an imaginary pair. They had just emerged from the little by-road that led from Mère Fouchet’s cottage.

The men always called for her on the way to meals and parted with her at the cottage on the way back.

They laughingly called themselves “The American Colony.” To the villagers the trio had at first been simply “the Americans.” It was easier to designate them thus collectively as they were always seen together.

One day a village gossip winked significantly, remarking “There go the Inseparables!” and ever after they were known as “The Inseparables.”

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When the men began to hunt for a cottage Alina's fresh knowledge of every lane and by-way had been invaluable. In the most sequestered lane of all, on the very edge of the town, they had found an untenanted cottage quite hidden from the outside world by a high wall of masonry.

After much parleying the owner permitted them to enlist the services of the village carpenter, who cut an opening in the north side of the roof into which he set a large studio window, the upper story making a fine working room.

Below they had a living-room, dining-room, kitchen, all in one. There were also two small bed-rooms with tiled floors.

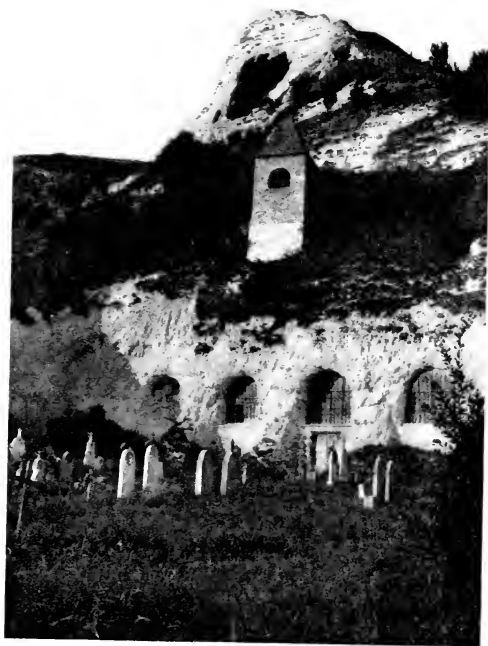
The studio was reached by an outside stairway at the gable end of the cottage. A walk of flat stones led from the house to an old green door in the high wall.

The garden was an artist's paradise. As Ben said, "Herrick would have written odes to Julia here."

At the foot of the lane was the Chapel of Our Lady of the Valley. They had never seen such a chapel before. The rustic architect had tunneled into the face of the chalk cliff. It reminded the Americans of the houses of the cliff dwellers in Arizona. The little spire came up through the grassy field above. The artists could hear the tinkling of its vesper bell each afternoon as they sat in their walled garden.

And so in the midst of these Norman orchards, Ben and Felix had taken up life again, a new joyous ring in Felix's voice, a calm satisfied look in Ben's kind face.

Alina's story amused the men. Their laughter filled



"They had never seen such a chapel before."

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the market place. As they mounted the steps Felix and Ben were received with better grace than Alina. Women have a way of making these little distinctions.

"Dites-donc Felix!" called Miss Dolchester as she made room for him upon the bench beside her. "I have something to tell you!"

"Ah! here come the Count and his Hindu," said Ben as he and Alina threw themselves upon a low table and idly swung their feet. "I wonder what brings them to town?"

Alina had not heard his words. Her eyebrows were contracted. This cold assurance in Miss Dolchester annoyed her. It was not jealousy, she knew not the meaning of the word. The intimacy which Miss Dolchester's salutation implied was unpleasant.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?" muttered Miss Dolchester in low tones as Felix seated himself beside her. There was selfish intent, desire, admiration in her look. "I needed your criticism. You know I value it more than the Master's. I am wretched, disgusted! My 'Invalid of the Cottage' will never see the Salon."

"Don't say that," exclaimed Felix, "you have such a fine start."

"Yes, but Madame Maréchal has been most annoying," she replied vexedly. "Posing her in bed was a great mistake. She was far too comfortable. I had to shake her up every five minutes. She had a way of dozing off just when I most needed her. The last time I shook her she wouldn't wake up,—she couldn't—she was dead!"

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Felix winced. He could not meet her cold, heartless glance. "Poor Madame Maréchal," he said compassionately, "her sufferings are over."

Miss Dolchester's face hardened. "You waste your pity on my wretched model. You have none for me."

Felix's innate gallantry saved him. The pitiless eyes softened as he replied "*Au contraire!* The world has lost a great masterpiece. I am sorry you could not finish your picture. It would have been powerful—strong."

"I suppose I can start another," she replied. "If that religious weakling had helped me keep the old lady awake instead of telling her beads all day I might have finished it."

The "religious weakling," was Madame Maréchal's only daughter, a slender girl of sixteen with a chaste, spiritual face. Bastien Le Page would have painted her as a Jeanne d'Arc. Felix meant to paint her some day as the Virgin.

The girl's history was a page from the supernatural. The villagers accepted startling facts concerning her life with the simplicity of children. Madame Maréchal had always been deeply religious. The first great event of little Celeste's life came with her first communion. Dressed all in white, the embodiment of spiritual purity, bearing the sacred taper, she walked in the immaculate procession. As they knelt before a wayside altar there was sudden confusion. A horse frightened by the fluttering banners dashed into their midst.

There was a quick cry of pain from little Celeste.

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They found her white and silent on the ground. The crowd thought her white veil was her winding sheet, but she opened her eyes, then moved her arms. They tried to stand her upon her feet but the poor little limbs refused to do their duty; she was paralyzed from her waist down.

Madame Maréchal carried her darling home and prayed the saints and Blessed Virgin to save her. They would; she knew they would; Little Celeste knew they would; but she became more and more helpless.

The poor mother bethought herself of Lourdes. Wonderful cures had been wrought at Lourdes, but alas; the Pilgrimage was but just over and she could as easily have gone to the moon; for they were poor, very poor. One day a notice in the post-office attracted Madame Maréchal's eye. It advertised a pilgrimage to the Sacred Pool of Sainte Mathilde some forty miles away. God was merciful; her prayers would be answered. She went with little Celeste. The villagers who accompanied them said they saw the miracle at the pool. Those who did not go knew that little Celeste ran and played like other children ever afterwards.

"It was always the pilgrimage," continued Miss Dolchester. "If her mother could only be kept alive until next August. If she could only be dipped in the Sacred Pool. More the pity I say that she couldn't have been dipped last week; she might be posing to-day," she laughed bitterly.

A sudden silence fell upon the company. All turned simultaneously. A funeral procession was coming up the

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street with muffled tread. It was a picture which they had often seen upon the walls of the Paris Salon but more often in this roughly paved little square, where the minor chanting of the choristers rang with a peculiar hollow quality between the stone walls.

The cross was carried ahead; then came the venerable *Curé*, followed by the bier which was borne by two rustics.

"It is the good Madame Maréchal," said the Master sadly. "I have known her for twenty years." He uncovered his head and crossed himself as the clumsy peasants bore their burden past.

"Little Celeste," he said aloud, as the procession filed into the church, "did you see her, Monsieur Felix? The only mourner? Was she not beautiful?"

"More than beautiful, she seemed translated," replied Felix.

"A wonderful case, that of the little Celeste," continued the Master.

"You surely don't believe all this rubbish about her?" said Miss Dolchester with a sarcastic smile.

"It has happened in all times, in all faiths, in all countries, Mademoiselle." It was the Hindu who spoke. He had been standing passive, immobile, with bowed head as the procession passed, but as he spoke his eyes seemed to glow with some psychic force from within; his sensitive nostrils dilated.

"Nature is always harmonious," he continued. "Truth repeats itself ever and eternally. These things were done in Christ's days, why not now?"

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"A Hindu priest, and you believe in the relics of the Church of Rome?" Miss Dolchester laughed scornfully.

"I *believe* in no church, I *believe* in no creed, I *know*, the infinite power of a man's spirit over this"—he struck his broad chest a resounding blow. "This force, this power of spirit—mind—if you will—over the human body has been demonstrated time and time again all down through the ages." He stretched his index towards the church. "Little Celeste has demonstrated it although she was heavily trammelled by superstitions and useless creeds. Your infamous wife beater Jacques Potin"—he turned to the Comte de Baigneur, "demonstrates it each time he strikes his helpless wife, for each time the acid of his anger gnaws at the vitals of his wretched body. Ah, yes; a wonderful power is the mind, it can work both good and bad," he exclaimed as he seated himself beside the Count.

"Come! Come! Felix!" Miss Dolchester joggled his elbow, "One would think the acid of your conscience were eating out your heart!" she laughed mockingly.

Felix was leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, looking into vacancy. It was the same old fearful look. Ben saw it from where he sat. Felix had forgotten that Miss Dolchester existed. "I was only thinking," he replied as he sighed deeply. "Ah, well, it doesn't pay to think sometimes." He laughed.

A babel of voices followed the Swami's words, but presently they were all listening to the Master. Like the patron's ordinaire his genial presence brought the spirits of the mixed company to the same level. There was a

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humorous twinkle in his eye as he turned towards the Comte de Baigneur. "Do you remember Papa Mourlot? He mended shoes when we were boys. They used to call him the Coward of Bréport. There is where he did his cobbling over yonder." He pointed to a little shop at the end of the square.

"*Eh bien*," the Master went on. "Papa Mourlot was afraid of everything. He would not go out after dark. He feared dogs great and small. If a neighbor raised his hand to scratch his head, Papa Mourlot would duck his own in fear of a blow. Sudden noises terrified him. The sound of a shot-gun would strike terror to his heart. He knew that some day a random shot would kill him at his bench.

"The *gamins* of Bréport made his life a burden. A prince of *gamins* was Guibray. One day he stole his father's shot-gun and loaded it with blank cartridges. He also begged a bladder full of blood from the butcher. 'When I break the bladder on the coward's head, you fire the gun,' he said to his brother. 'He will think he is hit, or I am a liar, *parbleu!*' Papa Mourlot was pegging away at his shoe. Guibray stole in at the open door. His brother was just outside the window. Bang! went the gun. Into the air sprang Papa Mourlot. The blood from the bladder streamed over his face and hands. The *gamins* shrieked with glee. 'What a joke—the coward thinks he is hit!'"

Miss Dolchester was laughing boisterously, but Schock raised his hand—"Attendez un instant! I have not finished! The cobbler crouched among his boots and

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lasts upon the floor. 'Ha! ha!' laughed the *gamins*—he thinks he is hit! he thinks he is hit!' One of them crawled into the door and gave the cobbler a push. He rolled over. The *gamins* ran away with white faces—he was dead!"

"Ah yes; I ran too!" exclaimed the Count, "and so did you, *Maître*." He was gently smiling at this little glimpse of his boyhood. "It was my first lesson in metaphysics. It set me to thinking. Ah yes; a wonderful thing is the mind of man. Poor old Papa Mourlot's heart was stopped by fear. Fear is the cause of most bodily ills."

As they strolled into the *salle à manger*, Ben studied the Count's thoughtful, high-bred face and recalling similar heads in portraits by Velasquez, Van Dyck, or Hals, wondered if he could ever get the Count to pose for him.

"I am honored in being the President of the Society for the Investigation of Phenomena," continued the Count as they seated themselves. "You see where my first lesson in Metaphysics finally landed me?" he laughed softly. "The Swami and I keep very busy. We came to-day to see little Celeste. Her cure at the shrine of Sainte Mathilde is on record. We had not heard of Madame Maréchal's death. Poor child; we shall have to come again. We go on the Pilgrimage of Sainte Mathilde in August for further investigations. You should go too, it is most picturesque. It would supply a painter with a dozen *motifs*." The Count smiled.

"I think I will go," said Ben.

Chapter XII

“**I** TELL you I am painted out, old man!” said Felix, as he tossed his brushes on the floor with an impatient gesture. “I have struck bottom. I get there so often these days.” He began to pace the floor. “Think how we used to drop in at the Boston Symphony rehearsals for inspiration.”

“Yes,” said Ben, “and came home feeling that we could paint anything. You and I can’t do without music old boy, can we?” He laid aside his palette, stretched his arms and yawned. “I am afraid we shall have to make a little trip up to Paris, to hear the Colonne orchestra just as a bracer you know.”

“If there were only a piano or a melodeon in the village I might squeeze a little inspiration out of it myself,” said Felix. “Think what these poor people have left out of their lives, not even a wheezy church organ to tone them up on Sundays.”

“Terrible! Terrible!” said Ben, as he shook down the little stove in the corner and put on a shovelful of coal. “No wonder that their highest ambition is a rabbit stew.”

“I would give fifty francs, this blessed moment, strapped as I am, for any old thing to play on,” said Felix.

They started as the little bell hanging from a spiral spring over the door set up a clamorous tinkling.

“I wonder who it is,” said Ben, as he jerked a stout cord which passed through a hole in the wall, an in-



The Leper's Road.

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genious contrivance which enabled them to open the gate without descending from their studio in the roof. Felix started towards the door which opened on the outside stairway, but before he could reach it they heard three quick barks and a furious scratching at the door.

The men's faces lighted up with pleasurable anticipation. "Alina," they exclaimed in the same breath. When Felix threw the door wide open Jack came bounding in like an animated football. The little fellow knew where he was wanted. Dogs are keener than human beings in this respect. There were a few light footsteps upon the stairs and Alina stood framed by the doorway, her cheeks aglow, her hair in beautiful disorder. Her eyes sparkled, she was panting from healthy exercise. She brought good cheer and ozone into the place.

"Jack and I are out for a run, won't you come?" she said pulling off her knitted gloves and warming her hands at the stove. "We ran all the way from Mère Fouchet's. We came by the Leper's Road, where nobody could see our contortions." She laughed merrily. "My! how we did race, didn't we little boy?" She caught up Jack, who squirmed and slobbered her face in doggish ecstasy.

The Leper's Road was a disused lane, so called because hundreds of years before the lepers had used it in passing around the town.

"Of course we will come," said Ben. "Felix and I were just longing for some music or almost anything to stir up the sacred fire. Felix says he would play a hand organ if he could find one."

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Alina uttered a joyful little cry as she dropped Jack upon the floor and clapped her hands. "Oh boys! I have something fine to tell you! I have found an organ!"

"An organ?" the men uttered the word in unison.

"Yes, an organ!"

"Bless my soul, where?" said Ben. He was on the point of lighting his pipe, but the match burned itself out and scorched his fingers as he awaited her reply.

"At Sotteville."

"An organ at Sotteville? You must be mistaken. I have passed the church a dozen times when mass was going on, but I never heard an organ."

"Ah, but you never looked in, if you had you would have seen it."

"It seems to me I heard a flute or clarinet one day when I was passing," said Felix.

"No, you didn't, it was an organ," persisted Alina, "your clarinet was the organist playing with one finger."

Felix laughed. "A one-fingered organist! By Jove; these people are primitive."

"They beat the Dutch," replied Ben with a melodious chuckle. "But who is this organist of Sotteville?"

"Mère Colin."

"Who keeps the little café?" asked Ben incredulously "you are joking."

"No, I am not, I saw her playing yesterday. I went over to mass with Mère Fouchet. She says Mère Colin spent a year at an *institution pour demoiselles*, when she

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was young and learned to play the piano. She is the only person in the neighborhood who can read notes.

"And she reads with one finger," said Felix, commiseratingly. He was struggling into his sweater. "Great heavens! Think of the harmony hidden away in that old organ loft."

"We will open up a new world for them," said Ben from the depths of his red sweater.

Felix seized his cap. The depression of a few moments ago was gone. Music meant so much to him. One idea possessed him—to reach the organ loft as quickly as possible.

"I am going to Sotteville, will you go too?" he held the door open for Alina.

"Felix looks exactly as little Toto did the other night," said Ben "when we gave him the sou to buy a gingerbread man and he fell down in his hurry to get to the shop."

Alina broke into a rippling peal of laughter, as they trooped down the stairway and out of the old gateway. As for Jack, he was anywhere and everywhere, barking furiously all the time.

They turned down the lane to the Chapel of Our Lady of the Valley, then crossing the great high-road of Dieppe they struck into the wide fields, striding over stubble and earth clods with the swing of experienced pedestrians.

Alina always walked between the men. Her movements were supple and free. Deep breathing, long of thigh, shapely willowy arms which swayed with each step, she was a picture of youthful grace.

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The men were never uncomfortably conscious of her sex. As Felix said, she was "just one of them," almost as much so as any of the boys in the Quarter.

They loved her fearlessness. Her view of life was so simple. She thought all things good, as indeed they are except when the mind of man perverts them. In her desire to get at the truth, she often discussed subjects which would have brought a blush to the cheek of one less pure.

Soon they were walking along the top of the great chalk cliffs, the peaceful Norman pastures on their right; on their left the blue ocean churned itself into white foam upon a pebbly beach fifty feet below. A rough path followed the shore at a safe distance from the edge of the cliff, occasionally coming to an abrupt stop, where a landslide had scooped out a huge section of pasture.

"Ha!" exclaimed Ben, "Just what I was looking for." He pointed to an opening in the cliff. "The only place between Bréport and Sotteville where the beach can be reached from above. The *Maitre* says a deal of smuggling went on here fifteen years ago, but the coast guard—there is one now—prevent it nowadays."

The guard paced by them with the spiritless tread of one doing his beat. Muffled in his military cloak, he made a lonely figure in a lonely landscape.

"I would rather be a second-rate painter than one of those fellows," said Felix as they climbed the rise beyond the Smuggler's Gorge. They all stood silently taking in the wonderful panorama of sky, land and sea. Far beyond the rolling plain and rugged roofs of Sotteville, a great

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headland jutted forth into the blue sea. At its very end St. Margaret's lighthouse glowed warm and white against the sky.

As they tramped on, the life of the plains showed itself in a mysterious, will-o-the-wisp way. The clumsy figure of a shepherd suddenly loomed up, from where they knew not. In a hollow his flock grazed peacefully. A little further on a bent old hag seemed a part of the earth in which she was grubbing for roots. Her dingy clothes matched the dead stubble and ploughed field beyond.

Still further along smoke curled up from a little hovel built into the side of a knoll, the shelter of a company of brick makers whose work had been stopped by the sudden frost.

"They remind one of the prairie dogs out West!" exclaimed Ben. "You can't tell just where the next one will bob up." As he spoke two young girls started up from the shelter of some tall matted grass and walked along the path in advance of them. At the sound of voices one of them turned.

"Good morning, little Celeste!" cried Felix, "what takes you so far from Bréport this cold day?"

She smiled sadly. "Did Monsieur not know that I have lived with my aunt at Sotteville ever since Mama died?"

"No, my little one, I didn't," replied Felix, "but I am glad you have kinsfolk to comfort you." His voice was gentle and kind.

"This is my little cousin Marie," she said simply, with a naive attempt to include all in the introduction.

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She threw her arm about the slight girlish figure and drew her out of the path so that they might pass. There was something shielding in her action, a tone of compassion in her voice. Little Marie's delicate face was lighted with a radiant smile, but her eyes were cast down with seeming diffidence.

"You love your little cousin," said Alina kindly. Then she uttered an exclamation of pity as the younger girl looked up. She was blind.

Celeste saw the silent sympathy in the faces of the Americans. "Ah yes, Mademoiselle. Only the *bon Dieu* loves her more than I."

"You must bring Marie to visit me at Mère Fouchet's," said Alina kindly as they passed on. "Mère Fouchet will make us a fine *galette*."

"*Merci! Merci!*" cried the two girls.

"Marie loves *galettes*," said Celeste smiling.

They made a pretty picture standing on the desolate cliff in their little white Norman caps, cloaks, red woolen stockings and *sabots*.

"If we could only paint everything we see off hand, how fine it would be," said Ben, looking over his shoulder.

"We had better take the main road into Sotteville," said Felix, "It will be the shorter way." He was thinking of the organ.

Soon their footsteps sounded sharply on the smooth highway. They passed the Château of the Duc de Marney in the outskirts of the village.

"Oh!" exclaimed Alina. "I forgot to tell you. Mère

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Fouchet says the Duke gave the organ to the parish as a memorial to his mother. She died at the Château eighteen years ago."

"Ah!" said Ben, "that accounts for it—I wondered how it ever got there."

The village church stood at the apex of two converging roads. It was built upon a knoll, heavily walled upon all sides and approached by long flights of stone steps. The old pile was a relic of mediæval days, built for purposes of defence as well as worship.

Mère Colin's little café with its thatched roof and swinging sign, was just across the way.

Ben begged Alina to wait outside as a company of peasants were shouting over their cognac; but no, she would have a glass of *café noir*, they made it so well in these little *auberges*.

"*Ah! Bonjour Père Boudin!*" cried Felix as they entered the low door.

The old letter carrier of Bréport left his companions and saluted them effusively. "Mademoiselle and the messieurs come a long way for their *café!*"

"And Monsieur Boudin also," laughed Felix, "we come because Madame Colin makes it better than anybody else."

Felix's timely compliment had the desired effect. Mère Colin willingly consented to ask the curé for the much-coveted permission to play the organ.

As they left the café she turned to the noisy group of peasants. "*Attention, gamins!*" she cried, "not one of you leaves until I come back!"

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"They are *mauvais garçons*," she went on talking as they climbed the stone steps to the churchyard. "They serve me as they do the doctor; they sneak out of paying when they can."

They seated themselves upon the doorsteps while Madame hurried on to the Parish House. Soon she returned, red faced and panting, holding the key aloft.

"Ah Madame; you are so kind," cried Felix as he started to take it.

"*Non! Non! Monsieur.*" She clasped it tightly in her hand. "Wait one moment! I have a message! Monsieur the Curé thanks Monsieur Felix for his kind offer to play at mass next Sunday, but he says it is impossible as Monsieur is a heretic, but he can play all he likes this afternoon."

She handed him the key to the organ loft with great ceremony. "Here is the key; take it Monsieur! *Amusez-vous bien!* I must go to my *jeunes gens* at the café."

"So I am a heretic!" Felix laughed.

"I will stay down here;" said Alina as the men started up the spiral stone stairway "I can hear better."

She wandered aimlessly about the dusky interior, taking note of the curious offerings placed there by the fisher folk. A fleet of full rigged ships in miniature were suspended from the ceiling. The altar decorations of tawdry tinsel and paper flowers, seemed crude and barbaric but quaintly picturesque withal.

The afternoon sun filtered dimly through windows, much patched and weather stained. The blues, reds,

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yellows and purples had reached the wonderful tonality that age alone can give.

She spent some moments over the quaintly carved choir stalls and finally sought out a low, rush-bottomed chair within the shadow of a confessional box, against which she leaned her head.

She could hear her companions moving about in the organ loft. Aside from this, the place was still as death. She felt the presence of the centuries which the little church had seen. She thought of the countless masses which had reverberated under the vaulted ceiling. There was a musty, stifling quality in the very air, yet it was soothing and satisfying. The nervous, active, garish world seemed a long way off.

She never knew when the music began, but she became conscious of a sound like the wind blowing through the tree tops above Mère Fouchet's cottage. Then the air about her throbbed mysteriously. It was a deep, vibrative note like the breath of some great spirit. Gradually with gliding cadence, making the sails on the little suspended ships above her head quiver, a volume of rich, full, harmony filled the place.

The "Inseparables" were traversing Elysian fields. Their thirst was being sated by something dearer than the rarest wines of France. It is by vibration that one soul touches another and man attains his highest ideals.

The vibrative torrent of harmony which Felix drew forth from the organ brought the "Inseparables" nearer together than ever before.

Alina, alone in her dark corner felt it. Ben knew it

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as he pumped the bellows with the perspiration rolling down his cheeks. Felix—ah; Felix will know more later. Now he is a spirit soaring in other realms. The heretic is nearer the Great White Throne than the priest over the way can ever hope to be.

Alina sat with closed eyes. When she opened them, two girlish figures stood spellbound in the aisle. They might have been two saints out of the niches above the altar. There was the same primness of attire, the same severe arrangement of hair, the same uplifted eyes.

What was this mysterious, beautiful something that had taken possession of their church? They had never heard anything like it before. Celeste's softly curving lips were moving in prayer.

Little Marie was sobbing for joy; sounds meant so much to her little darkened life.

Celeste led the blind girl across the church to a little chapel near Alina. They both knelt in prayer. Some stray rays of sunlight stole in through the old window just above them and fell on their blond heads in patches of gold.

All the joy, the aspirations which Alina experienced in the soaring volume of harmony, she saw intensified tenfold in the faces of the kneeling girls.

Celeste was praying aloud; Alina could hear her distinctly "O Blessed Virgin, Mother of Jesus, grant my prayer! Grant that little Marie may see as others see, the wonderful works of God!"

Little Marie's beautiful brown eyes were raised heavenwards; the *vox humani* was chanting a celestial chorus.



Mère Colin.

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The little face seemed illuminated, translated. Alina started forward as a joyful, ecstatic cry rang through the church. "Celeste! Celeste! I see! I see!" Marie sprang to her feet and stood with uplifted face, reaching heavenwards with her transparent, tapering fingers. But the moan of despair which followed as she crouched upon the floor within Celeste's tender embrace wrung Alina's heart.

"O God!" the child sobbed "All is dark again! all is dark! but I did see! I did! I did! The *bon Dieu* knows I did!"

"Be at peace little one;" said Alina stroking the child's head, "perhaps you will see again some day."

"Listen!" said Celeste, leading Marie to a chair, "Monsieur is singing. That is how the angels sing."

Alina settled herself beside them where she remained until the music ceased when she joined the men at the foot of the stairs.

As they emerged into the sunlight, Celeste pushed Marie forward; she wished to speak her thanks, but all was lost in a succession of quick sobs.

"Poor child," said Felix softly stroking her hand "and will you come to Bréport for *galettes* some day?"

"Yes Monsieur—but I would much rather see."

"That you will!" said Celeste gathering the slender form in her arms and kissing the sightless eyes.

Little Marie clasped her intertwined fingers against her breast. "Ah—the *bon Dieu* is good!" Her face lighted up joyfully "and shall I see the sky, the flowers, the sea?"

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"Yes, my little one, God is good," repeated Celeste, and as they took their leave the two quaint little figures stood waving them a farewell.

Leaving the key with Mère Colin they once more struck across the great plain.

It had grown colder. The sparkling, silvery mists through which the late sun scattered rainbow tints made nature less earthly and more in tune with their own exaltation.

The hour, distance, passing forms were as nothing to them. For some time they walked rapidly in silence. Grand inspirations, noble ideals were coursing through Felix's brain with tumultuous rapidity. He longed to give expression to something great. "By Jove!" he cried so suddenly that a bird started up from the copse and sped away inland "I could paint anything if I had my brushes here this blessed moment."

"So could I" exclaimed Ben.

"And I" said Alina fervently.

"Ah well—" sighed Felix "God knows whether I shall paint to-morrow or not, but we had a good time to-day didn't we Alina?" He slipped his arm through hers in his boyish way.

"I had a wonderful time!" said Alina with a world of meaning in her voice.

Again there was a long silence which lasted until they were well on their way, then under the stimulus of frosty air and exercise their buoyant spirits broke all bounds.

Linked arm in arm the trio strode on merrily carolling

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quaint peasant songs which Mère Fouchet had taught Alina.

The shadows lengthened as they turned into the road above Bréport. The sun was sinking in the sea as they left the road and threw themselves down at the foot of a great stack of straw.

It was snug and warm there and they spent some moments in silence drinking in the opalescent beauty of the autumnal afterglow. They could hear the distant noises of Bréport far below. They knew when the *diligence* rumbled through the village. They heard the tattoo of the town crier's drum.

"I wish we could live here always!" said Ben putting deep stress upon "always." "This has been an afternoon to be remembered."

As he spoke, the sound of uncertain footsteps came from the highway behind them. Although they could not see the road, they recognized the old letter carrier's voice. He and his companions had stayed too long at Mère Colin's. The bad cognac had not only gone to his feet as Mère Fouchet had said, but to his head as well. The party of peasants were gossiping recklessly with loosened tongues.

"A pretty little wench, the American!" said a husky voice.

"They call them The Inseparables!" said another.

"Ho! Ho!" laughed the letter carrier hoarsely "The Inseparables! How may three be inseparable? It is the one of the straw colored hair I tell you!"

"Mère Fouchet says she is virtuous!" said a voice.

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"*Nom d'un chien!* what does Mère Fouchet's word signify! Is her own child not in Paris leading the life of a ——" The rest was drowned by their shuffling footsteps as they disappeared down the hill.

A cruel silence followed. Alina's face burned red and was buried in her hands.

With a savage imprecation Felix started down the hill after the peasants. Ben was at his side in an instant. He seized Felix's arm in a vice-like grip. Then he turned to Alina. "Shall we go on?" he asked gently. The men turned away as she rose to her feet. In a moment she fell into her accustomed place between them.

As they turned to cross the green before the little chapel of Our Lady of the Valley, Ben stopped. His voice broke as he attempted to speak.

"Alina!" The tenderness in his tones made her catch her breath and turn away her head. Quite unconsciously he held her hand between his own.

"We have been living in a fool's paradise. This sort of thing must not go on. They do not understand us. We must leave Bréport for your sake."

She turned upon them fiercely, "No! No! Not that!" She reached out for Felix's arm with her free hand. A pale imploring face was uplifted to theirs in the gloom. "Don't I beg of you! Don't break up this precious friendship! What matters it what these drunken wretches say?"

"No," replied Ben with infinite pity in his voice, "it matters little what they think of us, but you—you are

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a woman. We couldn't stand by and see this thing happen a second time without——”

“Killing! quick and sure!” broke in Felix savagely.

Alina shuddered. His voice was passionate, awful. His pallid, suffering face looked into hers. “So help me God!” he uttered in a hoarse whisper.

“Amen!” Ben's voice sounded through the still air like a deep organ note.

They went on in silence, the only sound a crisp crunching of the fallen leaves which littered the deserted Leper's Road.

Soon they could see the blue smoke of Mère Fouchet's cottage curling up through the trees just below them.

Alina stopped. “Good night!” She took Felix's hand and then Ben's. “You won't leave Bréport?”

“No!” replied the men in the same breath.

Chapter XIII

IT was bitterly cold. Village and plain lay buried beneath a pure white mantle of snow. Few of the peasants ventured abroad and those indoors were huddled about their little fires of colza stalks and fagots trying to keep warm.

It was Christmas night; the coldest known in Normandy for a quarter of a century.

A bright fire glowed and crackled in the great chimney of the dining room at Silleron. The lights had been lowered; the fire sent its fitful, mysterious glow over the rich *Henri Deux* interior.

Alina sat in a huge arm chair the picture of indolent comfort, her bare arms stretched carelessly forward in her lap.

The ruddy light outlined the delicately poised head, round slender neck and gleaming youthful shoulders.

"My little American is charming to-night." The Master finished his *crème de menthe* and placed his glass upon a smoking-table which stood between them.

"How could one be otherwise with such a charming host," she replied with an upward glance at the Comte de Baigneur who stood beside her chair.

"I, in turn am only charming because Monsieur Cushing would have me so." He waved his hand gracefully towards a portrait which stood upon an easel near by.

"I only painted what I saw," said Ben smiling. "You were an inspiration. I never painted a portrait so easily."

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He stood by the fire smoking one of the Count's rare cigars.

Felix started up from a low divan near the fire "Cushing is right!" he exclaimed vehemently. "A model can make or ruin a picture!" He was thinking of the unfinished Psyche boxed up and hidden away in the cottage loft.

"A model can certainly make the artist miserable or happy. We owe more than we can express to Ben's model—he has made us radiantly happy. It was so good of you to have us here to-night,"—Alina turned to the Count.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, I have lived in the States, I knew what the day meant to you Americans. Christmas in Mère Fouchet's *chaumière*? No; I couldn't allow that!"

"Take care Monsieur! Remember I am of the peasantry; I wear *sabots*! There are worse places than Mère Fouchet's cottage!" she shook her finger reprovingly

"I should say there were!" exclaimed Ben "On the plains of Arizona in a blizzard for instance!"

"On Christmas Day?" asked Alina.

"Yes; I was out among the Mokis with my cousin who was a member of a government exploring party.

"We had found some beautiful prehistoric specimens and buried them in a cave. We took careful note of the spot, as the mule teams would come to take them away in the spring.

"When we came to the village our interpreter met us

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with the ponies. We were surprised to find them all saddled and bridled. He said it would not be safe to stay longer, that the Indians had become hostile. Our lives were in danger.

"The nearest and safest place for us was forty miles away beyond a range of hills to the northward. The temperature was falling rapidly. It was spitting snow as we came down the trail and started off on a bee line for Bald Eagle Cañon, the pass in the hills.

"There was every indication of a blizzard from the north. We knew only too well what was before us, but chose the lesser of two evils and trusted the weather rather than the Indians.

"The fall of snow was light at first and we easily kept to the trail, but later it grew heavy and we had to use the compass. As the day wore on the snow fell thicker and thicker. Such a storm I never saw before and hope I may never see again! We could easily have made the forty miles by daylight in fine weather, but when night set in the ponies were well nigh exhausted. We had to work constantly to keep up the circulation in our feet and hands.

"A great wall of driving snow was all we could see. No hills. No pass. We toiled on into the night traveling always by the compass. At last we began to ascend and the wind blew a hurricane; we knew we had struck the pass, but it brought poor cheer. The wind sucked through the cañon with awful force. It became a struggle for life.

"There was a blueness about the interpreter's complex-



The Château.

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ion that I didn't like. I had to keep prodding his pony from behind.

"After awhile I rode ahead, my cousin taking his turn at the interpreter's pony. We were coming to a turn in the cañon. I started to call out that we were half through the pass, but a blinding knife-like gust swept through the narrow cut all but choking me.

"My pony buried his head in the snow and braced himself. I dismounted and crouched behind him. When I turned to look at my companions my heart sank into my boots, they had disappeared. Dragging the pony behind me I retraced my steps. I found the interpreter and his pony fallen and half buried in the snow. He was unconscious, the pony dead. My cousin answered my questions in a dazed way. He was trying to arouse the interpreter. Then to my horror he fell backwards into a drift and didn't move. It was awful!" Ben cast the butt of his cigar into the fire and began pacing the hearth rug.

"I poured the entire contents of my whiskey flask down the throats of the two men and fell to chafing them. Then a sudden sinking horror seized me, they were freezing to death. A dull stupor crept over me, but I fought it off by a mighty effort.

"I straightened up for a moment to beat my chest, but stood stock still. At first I thought I was dreaming. I couldn't believe my eyes. Through the storm I saw a light. I knew of no house within ten miles, but there it was appearing and disappearing as the storm thickened or lifted. I cried out for joy and turned to my pony,

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he was down in the drift, dead. My cousin's pony was still standing. As I caught his bridle he tried to drag himself out of the drift, but fell into a helpless heap. I turned and ran with might and main; once I fell and the numbness came on again, but I shook it off and kept on. The light grew brighter and brighter and in a few moments I staggered against the door of a house—yes, a house!

“At this point the cañon widens out leaving a little pocket or valley which is a little green oasis in the summer.

“If a burly Scotchman hadn't staked out a claim there the summer before, I shouldn't be here to tell you about it.

“I heard voices within. The door opened. The red whiskered, red faced Scotchman threw his pipe on the floor and caught me in his arms. I pulled myself together on short notice and we soon had my cousin and the interpreter lying on the floor.

“A little boy babe sleeping in a packing box filled with straw, born only an hour before, was the messiah who guided us there. If he hadn't come that night, the cottage would have been dark and his star—that precious kerosene lamp would never have shone out into the night.

“His parents asked us to name him. He came on Christmas night, he saved three souls so we named him Christus. Christus Cushing McDonald was his full name. What do you think of that for a Christmas story?” Ben smiled and reached for a fresh cigar.

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As he caught Alina's eye the blood mounted to his temples. If there is one thing a man loves above another it is just such a look as Alina gave Ben when he finished his story and then, he had discovered that what Alina thought meant a great deal to him.

"The little babe could not have had a better name. Few people know the full significance of that word messiah," said the Swami. He had been reading an ancient vellum-bound tome at a lamp somewhat removed from the company. He crossed the room and stretching out his open palms behind him towards the fire raised himself to his full height.

"I love the beautiful story of the coming of the Christian's Messiah, but there have been other messiahs. May I tell you of one?"

"Yes! Yes!" cried all in chorus.

"Very well;—There was once a principality of the Orient, where from time immemorial it had been prophesied that a messiah would come to its people. It was furthermore recorded that this messiah might come in the garb of prince, merchant or pauper; when and how it was for the people to discern. The one sign of his presence would be the bringing back by him from the unknown, the spirit of a departed prince or princess.

"There came to the throne a great and mighty prince whom the sages prophesied would some day prove himself the messiah of his people.

"All through his youth he studied musty volumes with his wise men. He spent his nights consulting the stars.

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His star was of good omen for at a great national fête he saw and loved the daughter of a visiting prince, the beautiful Princess Claudia.

“With feasting and ceremonies he placed her beside him upon his throne. She ministered to the wants of his people as a sweet angel of mercy would have done. No hovel was too humble, no lonely soul too sick for her. Her gentle presence was felt throughout the entire principality.

“It was in the little hut of a poor painter of dreams that she loved often to sit, for the marvellous fancies of his brush were as celestial visions to her.

“The poor painter treasured the visits more dearly than the fine gold which she was wont to give him each day as she left.

“The painter of dreams was never seen at court. There were others; they called them court painters who imitated flesh, hair, satin, jewels and gold so well that the Prince had named them his own. They wore velvet and fine linen and sat at his feasts.

“The painter of dreams was not envious. He was contented with his hovel, his ragged clothes, so long as the Princess came. He had never painted so well as when she sat and silently watched each vision grow beneath his master hand. But one day she did not come. The painter of dreams was heartbroken. The Prince tore his hair; the Princess Claudia was dead.

“The Prince caused the remains to be placed in the ancestral vault. He called for his philosophers and as-

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trologers. His love for the Princess was great, great enough he thought to call back her spirit from the dead. Might he not be the messiah of his people?

"The temple was crowded to the doors. The poor little painter of dreams sat in a distant corner. With incantations and incense the Prince tried to call back the spirit of his loved one, but in vain. Alas! he was not the messiah of his people. He humbled himself in sackcloth and ashes.

"As for the painter of dreams, he could think of naught else than the Princess. She was ever with him. Her beautiful face he saw as a constant vision. He locked himself in his hut. He was not seen abroad for many days. He ate not and slept not, but painted always.

"One day there came a knock at the door. He opened it and beheld the Prince accompanied by his courtiers and court painters. The Prince would fain know all whom his loved one had known.

"He bowed his head, so low was the poor painter's door. When he lifted his eyes he cried for joy—
'Claudia! Claudia! my beloved.'

"Shining forth in the dingy little room he beheld the spirit of Claudia. 'The Messiah! The Messiah!' he cried and fell upon his face.

"'Verily our Messiah has come' cried the wise men 'has he not brought back the spirit of our Princess from the unknown?' They threw themselves at the feet of the painter of dreams crying 'The Messiah! The Messiah!'

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“ ‘It is but a daub without method; one cannot even tell how the paints are put on,’ said the court painters jealously.

“The Prince arose from his knees in wrath. ‘It is *spirit* I tell you! One sees neither paint nor canvas! Begone miserable tricksters! Imitators of gold, satin and pearls! The spirit of Claudia lives, yea calls to me from yonder!’

“He took the painter of dreams to the palace and clad him in purple and laces. Upon the walls of the Temple he wrought mighty works. The people made pilgrimages from far and near to see them. They saw neither satin, pearls nor gold, but were led upwards to the God of Gods through the truths wrought by the Nation’s Messiah.”

The Swami stood for a moment intently watching the faces of his listeners.

“My friends, a messiah is one who brings Truth to a people. Truth is Spirit because it is everlasting. Do these self-elected disciples of so-called truth, these slaves of models who paint that in nature which dies and decays bring Truth? No! I tell you they are false prophets. The messiahs of the ages have preached, written, sung, sculptured, painted the *spirit*, only the *spirit* of man and nature which alone is Truth.

“The man who is the slave of his model paints a shell—a nothing.” The Swami swung down his right arm with a gesture of contempt.

“Right, he does!” Felix started to his feet with glowing eyes.

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True—true—all of it, but he fell to pacing the floor with troubled face. He loved this exquisite slavery. He hoarded the memories of his academy victories; they were the only bright spots in his Paris life. They had been worth achieving. He had won them by slaving from models.

As he came to an about-face, the Swami caught his eye. The Hindu laid a kindly hand upon Felix's shoulder. "There are depths to your nature that you know not of. You will grow. Time will tell."

"Time? Yes; of course. But have I time?" Felix seemed to address himself rather than the Swami. He brushed his hand across his eyes and turned to the piano, where he seated himself in a fit of abstraction, absently running his fingers over the keys.

Presently he swung off into the fire music of the *Valkyrie* and after a little, relapsed into the more soothing cadence of familiar Christmas carols. As he played the opening bars of Adam's Noel, Ben instinctively joined in, his big barytone voice filling every nook and corner of the great dining hall—

"Lo the Lord of Heaven
Hath to mortals given,
Life forever more."

Alina brushed away a tear when they finished and held up her two hands to the men as they passed her chair. "Thanks boys! It was so beautiful!" she murmured.

At Alina's request and after she had been bundled up

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in a shawl, the Count piloted them over the Château, telling them the story of each room and hall. It was a long journey and one that presented pictures and legends at every turn. There was an added charm in seeing their host's face light with pride and interest as he told the history of each scrap of armor and each piece of furniture.

The passage-ways were cold. They were shivering when they came back from their tour of inspection, so they once more settled themselves before the glowing fire and the Count ordered some hot drinks.

Felix and the *Maitre* had each to tell his Christmas story and it was midnight when Ben said they must go.

As the Count was in the act of ringing for the carriage, Alina declared her intention of walking back to Bréport with the men.

When she came down all bundled up in Mère Fouchet's widow's cloak, looking for all the world like a very young Norman widow with very pink cheeks, she presented Ben and Felix each with a newspaper to put in his dress suit front.

"I wouldn't have my two boys take cold for anything," she exclaimed with a little grandmotherly air. "Good night, *Monsieur le Comte!* Good night, *Maitre!* I am glad you are to stay over night. Keep him warm, Count!"

Their "good nights" echoed down the long avenue of mighty oaks and their feet crunched the brittle ice as they passed out into the moonlight. Great masses of broken clouds sailed across the face of a cold brilliant



Potin's Auberge by the Wood of Blossenville.

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moon. There were quick, joyful exclamations as they encountered countless pictures of snow-bound huts enveloped in the mystery of moonlight. Here and there a lighted window glowed warm and red.

As they came out into the open, they noticed foot-prints leading away between the furrows of the ploughed fields. Felix stopped and examined the ground carefully. "I thought so!" he exclaimed as he stopped and tore up a long piece of twine.

"Poor little larks!" exclaimed Alina, "how they will suffer in the morning."

"Yes; every boy in Bréport has set his line of snares to-night," said Ben.

The *patron* will give us larks on toast; larks *à la brochette*; fricassee of larks; we shall revel in larks for a week."

"Not I—" exclaimed Alina—"eat a lark? Why; I would as soon think of eating an angel."

"Let's go by way of Blosseville," interrupted Felix as they came to a fork in the road. "The view from the hill will be stunning to-night; it is only a mile further."

They had the deserted highway to themselves and fell to singing. As they passed a hut, a night-capped head was thrust forth from a doorway in wonderment.

"If we were on the other side of the channel he would toss out a penny for the waits," laughed Ben.

They stood for some moments on the hill above Blosseville, studying the marvels of a frosty midnight landscape; then they plunged down the slope singing an English song, the melody of which pleased Alina, but

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the words meant more to the men. They were both singing it with more feeling than usual.

“ Since first I saw thy face
I resolved to honor and obey.”

Before them towered the rugged tops of a grove of pines. In the gloom at their base they could see a solitary flickering light, coming from the snow-banked window of a little *auberge*.

In the silence which followed the song they could hear the sighing of the wind through the pine needles aloft, then a terrified cry startled their keen senses. A figure staggered towards them out of the gloom. The haggard face of a woman confronted Alina—“ For the love of God come quickly Madame! My daughter is dying!” She seized Alina by the arm.

“ Wait for me outside, boys! Perhaps I can help her.” Alina followed the woman.

The picture within the hut was not new. There was the usual earth floor; a few crude chairs; a dresser; a table. The big box-like bed, a little house of itself, stood in a corner.

With his back to the door hugging the fire, was a bloused peasant. He did not even turn as they entered, but muttered something more like a snarl than anything else.

The only light besides that of the smouldering fire came from a tallow dip which burned within the bed. It sent little shafts of light out between the spindles of the sliding doors.

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"What is the matter?" asked Alina as the woman pushed open the doors with feverish haste and uncovered something at the foot of the bed.

The mute reply came so quickly that Alina sickened and closed her hands over her eyes for an instant. It was a new-born babe silent in death, but when she turned to look at the mother she was pale and calm.

The unconscious face upon the pillow was so young and beautiful as to startle her into an exclamation of surprise, even at this painful moment. She took the listless hand in her own. It was cold; she could barely find the pulse.

She hurried to the door—"Quick, Ben! Your flask!" She was back at the bedside in an instant forcing some warming fluid between the colorless lips.

She chafed both hands and feet and after a few moments the long drooping lashes fluttered and lifted. The eyes that gazed up at her were of such surpassing loveliness that she looked and looked until the face on the pillow lighted up with a sort of recognition. The pallid lips moved. Alina bent her head and listened—"God's angels! The *bon Dieu* has sent his angels!"

"Send him for the doctor!" said Alina, nodding her head in the direction of the man at the fire.

The woman shrugged her shoulders—"He refuses. He says it is too cold."

"Too cold!" Alina's brows knitted. She started across the room with clinched hands.

"No! No! Don't do that! He has been drinking! He may hurt you!" The woman caught her arm with

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frightened face, but she tore herself free. With blazing eyes she was at his side in an instant tugging at the sleeve of his blouse. "Will you kill your daughter? Go I say and bring the doctor at once!"

He turned upon her with a fierce cry and staggered to his feet, his face distorted with rage. She recoiled just for a moment. The bead-like eyes and scowling brows of Jacques Potin were twelve inches from her own. She recovered instantly, however, and met his gaze unflinchingly, never heeding the great horny fist raised in air ready to strike.

In that short instant a fresh fear seized her. Felix!—Potin must not see Felix! He must not even know that Felix is in Bréport!

Her heart gave a joyful bound. The doctor! She would send Felix for the doctor!

Suddenly as she started towards the door a light flashed in their faces. Felix was calmly lighting his cigarette just outside the window. His pale face stood out with cameo like distinctness.

Potin uttered a savage curse; he recognized him instantly. Half blind with drunken rage he mounted a stool and reached for his fowling piece. It was on a rack above the fireplace.

Alina thanked God for that one precious moment. She flew to the door, pulled out the key and quickly locked it from the outside.

"Quick! Quick Felix! Run for the doctor!" She caught him by the arm. "The first house at the foot of the hill! Go—oh go!"

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Then as he sped away she needed the support of the strong arm that was thrown about her just for a moment.

"We had better get away!" Ben nodded towards the door. They could hear the curses of the infuriated peasant within.

* * * * *

"Thanks dear boy, for going so quickly! The doctor is needed there badly." There was a peculiar tenderness in Alina's voice that made Felix strangely happy. They had found him awaiting them at the foot of the hill.

Chapter XIV

“CITIZENS, we have passed through the cleansing fire of revolutions. We have felt the oppression of Prussia’s armies, but thanks to the Republic, our glorious nation still lives.”

Bellemaire, mayor of Bréport, stood upon the steps of the *Mairie* haranguing his fellow citizens. He wore the tri-colored sash of office. Ranged upon either side of the steps were the *pompiers* in their shining brass helmets and the *sappeurs* in their huge bear skin hats. It was the Fourteenth of July. The mayor had left his pestle and mortar, for he was the village apothecary, to deal out patriotism in allopathic doses.

“We have had kingdoms,” he continued.

“Long live the king!” cried a voice in the crowd.

Bellemaire lowered his bushy gray brows threateningly, but kept on.

“We have had empires.”

“Long live the Empire! Down with the Republic!” cried several voices in unison.

“But the Republic has always come back,” continued Bellemaire. “It is the backbone, brain, sinew of the nation.” He waved his arms frantically.

“Down with the Republic! Long live the Social Revolution!” Felix turned quickly. A husky voice was in close proximity to his ear. “But we celebrate just the same, don’t we? What would we do without fête



"It was the fourteenth of July. The mayor of Bréport stood upon the steps of the Mairie haranguing his fellow citizens."



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days?" The corpulent owner of the voice laughed and slapped Felix on the back.

"Ah Rouvier—you here?"

"To be sure! Why not? I must gainsay that ignorant blockhead over yonder who expatiates upon this survival of a rotten Empire. *Nom d'un chien!* Your American plutocracy beats it by many lengths."

"Enough, Rouvier!" cried Felix with mock fierceness. "The American colony is on its way to buy materials with which to make an American flag. No slurs upon our Republic please!"

"If the American Republic were one-half as charming as the American colony I would be content," said Rouvier, with his watery eyes fixed upon Alina.

"Mademoiselle Durlan, allow me," said Felix with some constraint. "This is Monsieur Rouvier, an old friend of the Quarter. Cushing you already know," he turned to Rouvier.

"Know him?"—exclaimed Rouvier as he grasped Ben's hand,—“who doesn't since that wonderful caricature which Stumpy of St. Louis made of him was hung at Mootz's.”

Rouvier, novelist, realist, anarchist, socialist, Bohemian; anything but the usual, had played an important role in that old life of the Quarter.

Indeed, Felix suddenly remembered that Rouvier had sent them to Bréport. Rouvier owned a chalet half hidden by trees and vines up on the hillside above the stream. It was his habit to collect a few choice spirits

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of the Quarter and bring them to Bréport for the hot weeks.

Felix disliked the way in which Rouvier's glassy eyes followed Alina about. He would not have her know him. He began to edge away with excuses.

"We shall be *en fête* to-night," cried Rouvier. "Come; all of you!" He laughed his fat laugh and winked. "Felix knows how to work our latch string—Eh—olt poy!"

"Olt poy!" laughed Felix as they left the crowd. "Rouvier always would try to speak English." His face suddenly became grave. He remembered how much Rouvier knew of his own life.

"Rouvier must be good company," exclaimed Alina, "he looks so fat and jolly."

"Yes," said Ben, "he is fat and jolly enough, but he lives the pace that kills. Did you notice how his hand trembled? It is the absinthe and other stuff. It plays the deuce with him. He has to dictate every word he writes. No; we mustn't run with that set."

Something in Ben's voice made Alina look up. She detected a look in the men's faces which called up the memory of an October evening when they all three stood in the gloaming before the little chapel of Our Lady of the Valley, and she recalled the oath that the men had sworn.

"Here we are at Madame Blondel's," she cried, "we will rummage every nook and corner of the little shop. Turkey-red is just the thing. There's a big roll of it. We can use it for a ground; sew on white stripes, put

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on a patch of blue cambric, stick on the stars and *la-voilà* the Star Spangled Banner."

They soon completed their purchases and were on their way to Mère Fouchet's laden with numerous small packages. In a half hour the little garden presented a sight such as would have gladdened the heart of any homesick American.

Mère Fouchet had borrowed a little sewing machine that ran by hand. She and Alina were sewing on the stripes. Ben was cutting out stars while Felix was sticking them on.

The fact that their flag showed the stars and stripes upon one side only did not trouble them in the least.

Felix was in the act of pasting down the last leg of the last star when they heard strange noises coming from the direction of the Château. A babel of voices singing, mingled with shouts of laughter and the beating of tin pans. There were calls of "Where are the Americans? Where are the Americans?"

"It is the class," cried Felix, peering through the hedge, "and the *Maître* is marching ahead with the tri-color like a drum major. There is Dolchester carrying the British flag and—goodness me—Schovatsky has the Russian colors and Topsue the Danish. Quick! give me that flag!"

In an instant he was on the well house roof waving like mad. "Now, three cheers for Old Glory," cried Ben. All joined in including Mère Fouchet who did not cheer in time, but Jack barked so hard that nobody noticed it.

It was the hour of déjeuner. The Master and pupils

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were on their way to decorate the Chariot d'Or in honor of the National Fête.

The Americans joined the procession, which created a sensation as they entered the market place and halted beneath the great archway of the Chariot d'Or.

The Master mounted the terrace and announced that his pupils, out of compliment to the French nation, had made the flags of their various countries with their own hands; that they would decorate the building at whose hospitable board they had sat for so many months.

Felix found a ladder, a hammer and nails, some pieces of rope, and as the *Maître* handed up his tri-color, somebody shouted—" *La Marseillaise! La Marseillaise!*" The Master uncovered his head and sang the stirring song of France in a quavering voice.

There was wild enthusiasm as M'lle Schovatsky's rich contralto voice followed with the grand Russian hymn. Then came the British, Danish, Swedish, and last of all the American anthem.

Ben mounted the terrace and raised his flag.

There were low mutterings, a few hisses when a gust of wind flapped the stars and stripes in his face, leaving the turkey red back exposed to the crowd.

"Long live anarchy! Up with the red flag! Down with the American Plutocracy," cried Rouvier.

In an instant pandemonium reigned. A brick spun past Ben's head and went crashing through the window at his back.

From his perch upon the ladder Felix had seen the hand that hurled it. With a bound he was at the country-

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man's collar and as Ben started to sing the Star Spangled Banner there was a splash accompanied by shouts of laughter. The clumsy peasant lay floundering in the horse trough. Felix was back upon the ladder in a moment. He was gasping for breath. His face was white, but he laughed with the rest in boyish glee.

How often has a single voice sealed the fate of a nation. The guffaws of laughter at their countryman's expense aroused the rustics' good nature. Ben's great barytone voice soon filled the little square, carrying them on with resistless power until the place rang with their shouts.

Only one of them, an awkward, shock-headed, sullen-faced peasant shook his fist and muttered—"Down with the American pigs." He wrung the water from his bedraggled blouse and disappeared down a deserted alley.

* * * *

As night came on, trumpet blasts, shrieks of laughter, the rhythmic tread of heavily-shod feet filled the air. The Grain House, usually the scene of hard-driven bargains over sacks of wheat, had been transformed into what seemed a fairyland to these toilers of the soil.

Festoons of Chinese lanterns, great oil lamps, suspended from the rafters, sent a ruddy glow out into the moonlit square.

Bellemaire, accompanied by the wife of a Paris notary summering at Bréport, had opened the ball with steps befitting his exalted position and the National Fête.

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There were blouses and *sabots* in plenty, freshly starched caps and gaudy ribbons.

The Master was there with his class.

"You do not dance, M^{lle} Dolchester?"

"No, *Maitre*; not with such a herd as that."

"Wait until Felix asks you. Nobody was ever known to resist Felix."

"Small chance of my dancing with him, you see he is otherwise occupied." She shot a contemptuous glance across the room.

Felix and Alina were vainly trying to catch the time. He had his arm about her waist. They laughed boisterously as the rustic couples dashed against them, knocking them back each time.

Finally they sped out into the middle of the hall. Felix had not been so happy for many a day. Whenever the laughing, honest eyes met his he would always reply with an indignant—"Tired? Pshaw, no! I could never tire dancing with you. This is Heaven." He whispered the last three words in her ear.

"Humph!" said Miss Dolchester with a pout, "Felix calls her one of them, just like one of the boys, and all that sort of thing. She doesn't look it to-night. A woman who shows shoulders like that is not trying to look like one of the boys. Nay—Nay!" She waved her hand negatively and laughed bitterly.

She half closed her greenish gray eyes and pursed out her thin lips scornfully as a low feminine laugh came from the depths of Felix's shoulder.

"Bah! I can't see any fun in watching these clod-



A Norman Market Place.

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hoppers. Come girls!" She turned to leave, but her gaze became riveted upon another pair of eyes across the hall. They were set like beads beneath scowling brows.

As a cat's alert eyes follow the flight of a bird, these eyes followed Felix's every movement with a look of malignant hatred.

"Ha Felix! You have an enemy," muttered Miss Dolchester. "*Sapristi!* What a type! Ho—Père Boudin! Tell me—who is yonder brute? Next the girl with the handsome eyes—I must paint him some day."

"Jacques Potin, Mademoiselle! He keeps the little *auberge* by the wood of Blosseville. A *bon garçon* Jacques! He gives credit. Many is the glass of *fine* that I have had at his expense. *Enfin; Bonsoir Mademoiselle!*" Père Boudin made an obsequious bow and started for the door. Miss Dolchester followed in his wake as he pushed his way through the crowd.

"You must be tired, Felix. There! I knew you were," said Alina, as Felix caught his breath and seized her arm for momentary support. There was that in his face which made her follow his gaze with frightened eyes. Merciful heavens! Potin? and Felix had seen him! The scowling eyes met hers in hate. She involuntarily drew Felix in the opposite direction. She must keep them apart at any cost.

It was not however Potin whom Felix saw, but Lili—"the girl with the handsome eyes," as Miss Dolchester had chosen to call her. He had seen a look in those eyes that he feared more than hatred or jealousy.

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"Come, Felix! You are tired!" Alina looked up anxiously.

"Yes," said Felix in a toneless voice, "I am." But he seemed suddenly endowed with strength. He forced his way through the perspiring crowd with nervous haste.

"No! No! I demand it! I must have this next waltz! Felix; you shall not have all!" The *Maitre* stood in Alina's path. She cast an anxious glance after Felix as he quickly disappeared across the moonlit square.

Poor Felix. In the heyday of happiness Lili's star-like eyes had looked out at him from a sea of dancers, just as they had done on that memorable night of the *Mardi Gras*.

Like a cruel hand came the hated past dragging his cup of joy to the earth. Despair seized his very soul; he sought relief in action. Stumbling along over hillock and plain he unconsciously circled the town. As he rudely parted the twigs of a high hedge and was about to leap through the opening, the caressing sound of seductive music greeted his ears. A sonorous contralto voice lazily droned a Spanish love song to the accompaniment of a guitar.

There were countless lanterns and fairy lights set in the trees and shrubbery of a prettily bowered garden. Over against the thatched cottage sat Rouvier in an ancient, leather-backed chair studded with brass nails. Upon a quaintly carved table beside him was a huge punch bowl out of which a young woman was ladling an amber-hued fluid. She was a gorgeous butterfly of the

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"half world" whose golden hair challenged the amber of Rouvier's punch.

Half-sitting, half-reclining upon benches and chairs, or lolling upon Turkish rugs which had been thrown upon the sloping lawn, were Rouvier's friends.

The men wore long hair, pointed beards, and voluminous cravats. They moved and spoke with the insolent *bonhomie* of artistic vagabonds.

Bright spots of color indicated the whereabouts of the women. From the depths of the ivy-grown arbor close at hand came the melodious chords of the guitar. The singer now strummed, now laughed or broke into rich bursts of song in which the company joined as it suited their mood.

Fleeing from himself and the consequences of an irrevocable past, Felix greeted the scene with a cry in which there was an unmistakable ring of reckless joy. Here he would bury the past for a time at least.

A shout went up as his pale, surprised face peered through the hedge, looking ghastly in the light of a green paper lantern suspended from a limb just above his head.

"*Sacrébleu!* Felix; would you be Hamlet or the ghost? You will pass for either," cried Rouvier with his corpulent chuckle.

"Come—Come—olt poy! We will have only joy, song and love at *Sans Souci*."

"Ho Clarisse!" he cried as Felix vaulted down the bank. "Fill up a cup! We will soon have his cheeks

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glowing like your tresses. Here's to the *Revolution Sociale!* Here's to joy! Here's to Clarisse's nectar which makes gods of us all."

Felix drank off his glass to the dregs, then another, another and another.

In Clarisse's amber-colored ambrosia danger lurked. Liquors, like people, are often good of themselves, but in mixed company create havoc. As the subtle poison numbed conscience, care took flight, and in its place came a moral oblivion to all save the revelry of the moment.

It was not the best side of Bohemia into which Felix had carelessly drifted in his Paris days. To-night she once more held out her welcoming arms.

One of the men produced a violin, another seized the guitar. They mounted upon the table beside the punch bowl and played a mad quadrille into which Felix was dragged. In Paris he had been the gayest, wildest dancer of them all.

His partner, whom he had never seen before, danced with hoydenish *abandon*. As the quadrille came to an end, Felix threw himself upon a grassy bank breathing heavily.

"Well done, Felix! You dance like a demon. Here! take this, and this." Clarisse stood over him with two brimming cups. He drank them off and the languor produced not only by physical exhaustion but by the punch as well, became resistless.

Hoping to avoid the next dance, with an intense desire to rest, he turned to the vine-covered arbor. As he was about to enter, a well known voice greeted him. "Ah,

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Felix! So you, too, tired of the clodhoppers? You know where you are wanted. You see I am *de trop*." Miss Dolchester glanced at M'lle Schovatsky who was receiving the ardent advances of a poet in corduroys with only too evident pleasure.

The three were seated about a round table which was littered with glasses and sheets of music, for it was M'lle Schovatsky's voice that had sent the old Spanish love song pulsating out into the night.

Miss Dolchester's face had lighted with pleasure when Felix appeared upon the scene. Her cheeks were pink. The eyes, usually so heartlessly cold, glowed with a sinister fire. The magic of Clarisse's ambrosia, and the warm opalescent glow of the fairy lights, for the once made her singularly beautiful.

With scant ceremony Felix threw himself upon a long bench. "Ah, yes!" he ejaculated with a frown, "I had enough. It was hellish! I was glad to get away. I am tired!" He swept his hand across his eyes.

"Poor boy!" Miss Dolchester's voice was strangely tender. "Let me make you comfortable." Before he could realize what was taking place he sank upon a soft wrap which she had thrust beneath his head. Again came the drowsy feeling, a delicious sense of irresponsibility, then—oblivion. He slept, he never knew how long, and dreamed of soft velvety fingers tenderly caressing his temples and hair. It was Lili. They were once more on the old studio balcony in Paris. The canary was singing madly over their heads. The deep booming of the great bell of Notre Dame de Paris filled the air.

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Warm arms encircled his neck. Lili was uttering short, passionate protestations of love, words so distinct as to seem real. They *were* real! He could feel the fierce pulsing of the breast against which his head was strained.

Miss Dolchester's face was close to his; her lips all but touched his own. All was quiet save her deep, quick breathing. The candles in the lanterns had burned out. The revelry had ceased.

Moonlight filtered through the leaves in weird shapes, one of them lighted her face. He had never thought her even pretty, but now to his half-awakened senses she was possessed of a dangerous beauty, the like of which he had never seen before.

"I love you, Felix! Can't you believe me? See! I will refuse you nothing! Would Alina do as much?"

As the words passed her lips he started to his feet, dragging the clinging woman with him. With a curse he tore her arms from about his neck and threw her from him. His face was drawn and ashen. He stood over her quivering with wrath. "I will kill you! Yes, *kill* you, if you speak her name again!"

At first she lay stunned at his feet hardly comprehending his fierce onslaught. Then, slowly and surely beauty fled and in its place came a look of feline hatred and jealousy so hideous as to transform her into something loathsome, repulsive.

With a sinuous movement she rose to her feet and glided towards the moonlit garden. She turned back



*"Rouvier owned a chalet half hidden by trees
and vines."*

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upon him for an instant only with a cold sneer. "You will regret this!" and she was gone.

He waited until he heard the click of the gate latch, when he heaved a deep-drawn sigh and turning to the hedge, sought the opening through which he had entered. He parted the branches with both hands and disappeared into the night.

Chapter XV

“**L**ET us rest here!” said Alina, seating herself upon the stone steps of a wayside crucifix. “It is too hot to walk much!”

The night was wonderfully still, and they had abandoned the walled garden for the hill lying between the village and the sea. It was always cooler there.

The moon had been up for some time and they dreamily watched its silvery scintillating path in the sea. The men stretched themselves comfortably upon the steps at Alina’s feet.

Moonlight is conducive to confidences. Felix talked of his early life. How his father had sold one of his last patches of woodland in order that he might go north to study painting. How that one year in New York had made him all over, so that when he returned to the Virginia homestead he was restless and unhappy. He recalled how he had thrown open a shutter and gazed at the line of blue mountains while the locusts and bees sang their old fashioned song below.

The spacious, immaculate room laden with the smell of old-fashioned flowers was so unlike his attic lodging in New York. The massive colonial furniture abounded in memories of his childhood, yet he had experienced a feeling of home-sickness.

He had thought of his little room and the career he had mapped out for himself as he lay gazing upwards through his one scuttle window at the starlit sky.

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"My father was ignorant in matters of art." Felix's face clouded as he uttered the words. "He called my academy nudes indecent—unfit to be seen. He was cruel—stubborn! He told me I was depraved—mad! I couldn't make him understand that the greatest works of the greatest masters of all times were nudes.

"He said that I—a Braxton, the son of a Virginia gentleman, had no decency—no modesty. That if I had been doing these things for a twelvemonth I had much better have stayed at home. He *would* not understand! To him the nude was naked—immodest—vulgar anywhere, in a drawing or on the high road, to him it was one and the same.

"He said I must make no more drawings of this sort. I told him I *must* make them, for I could never learn to draw unless I did, so he told me to go and shift for myself."

Felix's voice quavered as he told them of the sad day when he bade farewell to "Oaklands." How old black Pompey, his caretaker from infancy had shed copious tears as he opened the plantation gate and waved his tattered cap. Then there were years of drudgery in a Boston lithograph factory where he saved enough to enter the Art School.

Alina had never spoken of her early life, but now she told them how her parents had died when she was but a mere slip of a girl, her father under a financial cloud.

A rich bachelor uncle had taken her to him as a daughter and it was on his stock farm that she roamed

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at will, cultivating a love for her dumb friends which lasted through life.

An aged governess was her only mentor. Time used by most girls in finishing at the fashionable boarding schools was employed by her in riding mettlesome horses or in sketching the beasts she loved so well.

Her earliest recollections were associated with the free and honest companionship of men, from the brusque, Scotch head-stableman to her uncle's club friends, some of whom were invariably at the farm.

As she grew to womanhood, the social foibles and petty jealousies of women mystified and repulsed her. It is not strange, therefore, that she had fallen into the habit of choosing men as her friends.

She gave a little laugh as she finished—"There, boys, you see what an uneventful life mine has been."

Felix had been listening intently. As she laughed he moved restlessly and looked up at her. "I wish there were more to laugh about in my past," he said in low tones. "I am going to confide in you and Ben to-night. I shall give up a secret that I have carried with me all my life. It will seem foolish to you, but it is terribly real to me. I have reached the point where I can carry it alone no longer." He uttered the last few words slowly and tremulously. "When I was a little fellow I had a little black boy named Joe for a playmate. His father had been my father's playmate and my grandfather had owned his grandfather. We were rascals, my little Joe and I. We fished and swam and ran. One day we ran a race and I came in ahead, but fell insensible at

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the finish. Little Joe thought me dead so he ran in terror to my father, who sent a man galloping for the doctor. Before the doctor's old chaise came bowling up the driveway I had become myself again and was playing with little Joe upon the front stoop.

" 'This doesn't look serious,' said the doctor as he climbed down and patted me on the head. 'But we must look into the matter, friend Braxton, just the same. Bring the boy inside.'

"It is strange how incidents like this fix themselves upon a child's mind. I couldn't have been more than seven, yet I can recall the dreadful silence in which the doctor took his stethoscope, which, to my childish imagination was an awful instrument and listened so long that I could hear my own heart beat.

"At last he looked up at my father. 'I find no cause for immediate alarm,' he said coughing under his hand. 'I am glad to hear it,' said my father and ordered me out of the room.

"There was something about the doctor's cough that made me think he had not told all. I could hear the drone of their voices through the open windows. My childish curiosity overcame all scruples; I crept up to a huge rhododendron bush which covered the lower half of one of the windows and listened. The doctor was speaking. 'If he lives to be sixteen he will die at twenty-five. This is almost invariably the case with this peculiar form of heart disease.'—Then my father came to the window and I fled to the hay-loft where I lay in silent dread for an hour.

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"To this day the doctor's death-sentence has been ringing in my ears. There are times when I forget it, and you know how happy I can be, but when things go wrong I give out here." He closed his hand over his heart. "It tells me what the doctor said was true.

"When I found out my talent for painting I had but one desire, one end in view, to paint at least one great picture before I—before what the doctor predicted came true.

"Ben knows how I started a 'Psyche' in Paris; one that I had long hoped to paint. Quite by chance I found a wonderful model. She was an inspiration. I worked as I had never worked before. I even forgot the doctor's sentence. I believed that I should live a full lifetime. Ah! I was so happy.

"I made a fine beginning; I attained my ideal in the head and eyes and—well I didn't realize the truth then, but I do now, that my model was bestial, that the purity which my ideals had created through the medium of her beautiful eyes and face was not there. She no longer inspired me. I saw only the animal—the beautiful animal. By heavens! Yes; I realize it all now.

"The doctor's sentence says twenty-five; I am twenty-four. Can you wonder that I long to finish that Psyche so as to tell those who sent me out here on this scholarship that I am not an impostor? But I shall be game to the end. Never fear!" He laughed carelessly. "Don't bother about it, old girl!" he patted Alina's hand.

She tugged desperately at a tall bunch of wild grass with averted head as she felt his slender fingers close

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about her wrist. She wouldn't have him see the tears that were coursing down her cheeks, but he did see them, and experienced a rare subtle joy.

If Ben felt anything, the merest tremor in his voice alone betrayed it as he struck a match upon the base of the weather-worn cross and pulled away at his pipe.

"Nonsense, old man. You are letting a foolish superstition kill you! The verdict of a back-country doctor down in Virginia." He threw the glowing match from him with a gesture of contempt. "You are foolish, crazy! You are letting a notion, an idea, hurry you to the grave. My God, Felix—how can you?" He spoke rapidly, fiercely.

Felix sprang to his feet with a wild, impatient gesture. "How can I? What a foolish question! Do you suppose I imagine this? I know it because I suffer. How can you call it a mere notion? Have you forgotten that day at the tennis club? Have you forgotten the weeks following?" He became reckless in his despair. "As for feeling things—imagining them if you will, the man who feels—lives. To be sure, he suffers more, but his joy, his love—Ah; you cold Northerners don't know the meaning of either."

Something about Ben, his very attitude as he stood silently stretching out his arms towards his suffering friend, gave the lie to Felix's words. Felix made a quick, impatient gesture as if to turn away, then with a torrent of sobs threw himself upon the ground at Ben's feet.

For a long time they spoke not a word. Ben stood over his prostrate friend with bowed head. Alina rested

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hers against the foot of the cross. The sound of the beating surf came up from the beach below and from the village the voice of a dog yelping at the moon.

The bell of St. Martin's throbbed out eleven melodious strokes. With a gentleness surpassed only by that tenderest of hearts which the bronze effigy on the cross above them imaged, Ben knelt and casting a loving arm about Felix drew him to his feet. There was a faint rustling of skirts and Felix trembled as he felt a warm tearful cheek pressed against his cold hand. "We are going to help you, indeed we are! You know we are The Inseparables. You forget what that means. It means that the Psyche will be finished! It means that the scholarship will be vindicated!"

* * * * *

"Was there ever such a girl?" said Felix as he and Ben turned away from Mère Fouchet's gate where they had just parted with Alina. The despair had gone out of his voice. "No—there never was." replied Ben. They walked home in silence.

Chapter XVI

DEAR, sunny, joyous Felix. Alina loved him with a love deep and simple and frank. Had she been asked to define it she would have said "I love him because he is Felix; because he is always Felix and nobody else. I love him because he is boyish, impulsive, free. I love him for his very faults. They are the faults of a warm, generous, affectionate heart."

She loved him as naively as she had loved the head stableman's little curly-headed boy on her uncle's farm with whom she had played as a child. Now she knew, as she supposed, the story of Felix's life. She knew what had made him grow paler and paler and more careworn, while he bravely tried to be the same joyful, happy Felix.

She thought of how precious the unselfish comradeship had become; how her heart had ached when she saw that sunny head bowed in agony. "No! No! No! It shall not be! It is all a cruel mistake. I will try to make him forget it. I will encourage him—urge him on with his work. The Psyche shall be finished."

She could not sleep. Repeated flashes of lightning, distant detonations of thunder, and at last heavy rain drops which splashed against the open window panes warned her of an approaching storm. She sprang out of bed, closed the windows, turned her pillow and once more burying her hot face in its cool depths tried to sleep, but in vain.

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Dear Felix; she could still hear his deep drawn sobs, his despairing words.

When the storm burst in all its fury she found in it a certain relief. As she lay there listening, now to the rush of the deluge upon the thatch, now to her own thoughts, a cry of distress from outside made her sit up all alert. Again she heard it and sprang from the bed only to stop and listen once more. She could hear Mère Fouchet's harsh voice through the roar of the tempest.

"Vile liar begone! You can stand the storm as well as Boudin's ass tethered out yonder. You are less fit to enter here. Go beast! Begone I say!"

Mère Fouchet was trying to force a bedraggled, shrinking form from the threshold when a firm hand seized her from behind.

"Little mother! Little mother! Are you mad? Are you no longer a Christian? Have you no pity? Would you send her out into this tempest to be killed? Who is she? Why do you treat her so?"

Barefooted, with distraught indignant face, clad only in her night clothes, her golden-brown hair tumbling in confusion about her face and shoulders, Alina stood before the old woman.

"She were better dead than living!" muttered Mère Fouchet doggedly. "She is the one of whom I have spoken. That was once her room." She jerked her head in the direction of Alina's bed chamber. "She was once my grand-child, but now—Bah! she is of the *canaille*—

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a low strumpet unfit for you to touch—Stop! Stop! Mademoiselle you shall not! Stop I say! Would you be defiled?”

Alina had pushed Mère Fouchet aside and was trying to lift the wet, crouching figure. The old woman uttered a cry of indignation and pinioning Alina's arms, pushed her back into the room. “No! No! Mademoiselle; it is my right! You shall not!” She planted her ample form before the door with arms akimbo. “Go to your room!”

For a moment Alina stood regarding the old peasant with fierce eyes; then her righteous wrath found vent in words. With tightly clinched right hand raised in air she again confronted Mère Fouchet.

“You shall not do this thing! If she goes out into the night I go with her! Do you hear? I go with her!” She stood with bated breath looking into Mère Fouchet's eyes, the picture of an avenging angel.

There came a blinding flash and simultaneously a crash so terrible that Mère Fouchet trembled and the crouching woman upon the sill cried out in terror catching at Alina's gown.

Mère Fouchet's eyes fell. “*Ma petite*; I couldn't let you do that—*Enfin*—do as you will but I will have nothing of her.” She crossed the kitchen to the chimney piece, reached for a tallow candle, lighted it from the one burning upon the table and disappeared into her own bedroom.

“Come!” Alina again reached down. The face look-

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ing up to her was beautiful but it bore the stamp of sin and suffering. "Come!" Alina drew her towards her own room.

The tender compassion in her voice, the familiar chamber which had once been hers, brought tears to the wanderer's eyes.

As Alina lighted the fagots already laid in the fireplace, and the flames began to roar up the chimney, her visitor threw herself upon the hearth-stone. Hiding her face upon her arm she softly cried until Alina who had put on her slippers and wrapper, drew a chair up to the fire and leaning over, gently stroked the throbbing temples.

At the touch the stranger started up—"No! You must not! Grand-mamma is right—I am vile! Vile! I must go! I must not stay here!" but she caught Alina's detaining hand between her own and covered it with kisses.

"The *bon Dieu* has again sent his angel—his sweet angel! Ah Mademoiselle, have you then forgotten?"

"Forgotten?" With mystified eyes Alina looked down at the sad face. When at last the recognition came, there was something in her look which caused the poor creature crouching at her feet to cry out in agony. "You know my vileness! You saw the evidence of my guilt that night! You do right to shun me. Ah; *Dieu me sauve!*" She threw herself upon the hearth-stone and buried her face in her arm.

Tears of compassion welled to Alina's eyes. She reached down and stroked the rain-soaked head. She

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had not at first associated these eyes weighted with the consciousness of sin, with those of the dying woman whom she had succored on Christmas night.

Lili raised herself upon one hand while with the other she brushed away the wet strands of hair which clouded her eyes. "Before God I swear I am not bad at heart! I was once pure! A beast came and took me from this—" She swept her eyes over the immaculate room. "He promised me everything—that I should be his wife. Instead, he poisoned my mind, my heart, until I knew not what was good or bad—then he left me for another. For a time I knew only my own misery, then—ah—then—" She spoke with lowered averted eyes, her voice sounded soft and tender. "I met another—an American painter. He was good and true and noble. He adored me. I became his model, his constant companion. He had never loved before. He gave me his very life. He never knew my past—he never asked to know, yet he would have atoned for what he called his sin against me by marrying me. But I was still a beast. I was selfish, vain. He let me pose for his friends. My betrayer had hardened my conscience until I cared not how I made others suffer. My head was turned by the attentions of the American's friends. One of them, a Frenchman, flattered me, tempted me; he hounded me by day and night until—Ah; *Mon Dieu!*" she pressed both hands against her eyes and once more threw herself at Alina's feet moaning and sobbing.

For a long time only the distant rumbling of the departing storm broke the silence, then Alina spoke.

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"And was the wretch who would have let you die on Christmas night your father?"

"He was; Mademoiselle!"

"And they condemn you alone for your sins? *Pauvre petite!*"

There was a long silence. Again Alina stooped to look into the suffering face. The storm-beaten outcast had found a gentle haven at last. The thick dark lashes still wet with tears rested upon the moist cheek. She slept the sleep of exhaustion. Tiptoeing across the room, Alina took a blanket from the bed and gently covered the sleeper. Then she blew out the candle and stole into bed. For a few moments she was conscious of her visitor's deep breathing, then she slept herself.

* * * * *

When Alina awoke the next morning the sun was shining in through the window, falling in great warm patches upon the empty hearth-stone. Her guest of the night before had stolen away in the early dawn.

Felix's confession confronted her afresh. She yearned to aid him in some way. She could hardly restrain herself from omitting her *café au lait* and running to the cottage to comfort and encourage him. And then there was the question of the unfinished picture and model and a thousand and one other things that she wanted to talk about. So when she had half emptied her bowl of coffee, she called Jack and started up the Leper's Road at a run.

She found the cottage gate ajar. Mounting the steps she passed through the open door into the studio. It



“The main street of Bréport was paved.”

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was unoccupied, but through a half-opened door leading into the unfinished attic she heard a sound of muffled voices. With a mischievous smile she gave it a gentle push.

Ben and Felix stood looking at a large canvas still in its case, the cover of which they had but just removed. The case was tilted up against one of the big roof beams and the canvas caught the full light of the one small window, the rest of the attic being dark and mysterious.

"No! No!" she cried, "I have come to see it! I must see it!"

Felix was endeavoring to bar her entrance. "You know it is unfinished!" he said with a hunted look in his eyes.

"That makes no difference!" she replied with a smile. "I want to see it."

She brushed past him and stood squarely before the canvas with her hands clasped behind. For a long time she stood thus; finally she turned upon Felix with a look which would have made any other man proud. It had in it the highest tribute that one artist can pay another. The silent tribute which places one on the highest pinnacle of honor, while the other looks up as a pupil to his master.

Finally she turned back to the *toile* with half closed eyes and tilted head, taking in the work with a professional air.

Soon a puzzled look crossed her face, and she uttered a surprised "Oh! Now I have it! I knew I had seen those eyes before."

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Felix sank down upon a packing case in a dark corner, he was pale to the lips. This Alina failed to notice; she was recalling how these same pleading, star-like eyes had looked up at her from the pillow of an old Norman bed on Christmas night.

She turned to Ben with a smile. "Do you remember how I caged the lion on Christmas night and Felix was angry because I wouldn't let him beard him?" She did not wait for a reply, but went on with her eyes fixed upon the canvas. "The girl whose life we saved had these same eyes." Then she suddenly remembered the visit of the night before. "O boys! I have so much to tell you!" "Only think; we saved Mère Fouchet's grandchild on Christmas night. She came back to the *chaumière* last night in the storm. Mère Fouchet was hard, cruel, brutal! O it is too awful to dream of—being an outcast."

The tears came to her eyes. "The dear little *mère* was doing it for my sake. She thinks me too pure to be defiled by the presence of her grandchild."

Alina threw herself upon a pile of packing straw. "Bah! it made me angry!" She bit fiercely at some straws which she was idly fingering. "Am I so good that I must stand by and see a poor suffering soul driven out into the storm? Driven back to sin? No! I couldn't. I made Mère Fouchet let her in. The girl had not forgotten Christmas night. She remembered my face." Alina lowered her eyes to the straws which she had been unconsciously plaiting; her voice was low and compas-

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sionate. "She told me her story. Ah me; how could one sin with such eyes?"

Her own were again fixed upon the Psyche. "How wonderfully like her this is, yes, wonderfully like her," she repeated absently.

Felix started to his feet and Ben began to pace the floor restlessly.

"She said she had posed for Americans. Why Felix! She may have posed for you!"

Both men were strangely silent. She cast a quick glance at Felix.

"Merciful God!" what had she done? With a low moan she buried her flushed face in her hands. Lili's story flashed before her in all its tainted sadness. The glaring truth confronted her in all its nakedness. Must she cast him off? Must The Inseparables break forever? What should she do? Each time that she asked herself the question she failed to find an answer, for each time his pallid, tortured face confronted her.

* * * * *

Ben's footfalls broke the silence with peculiar poignancy as he left the attic closing the door behind him. When he returned from a two hours' tramp over the plain he was surprised to find Felix singing at his work and in his face a contentment such as he had never seen there before.

Chapter XVII

THE walled garden was bathed in the reflex glow of huge vapory clouds that moved lazily across the sky. A hot July sun was sinking in the west.

Ben and Felix sat quietly smoking before their cottage door. There was a sound of clattering plates from within. The men had not eaten at the Chariot d'Or since the day of the National Fête.

Felix had decided the matter the following morning and Ben had fallen in with him, although he could not fathom the reason. They had engaged as cook an aged peasant woman who lived in their lane. She came and went with noiseless tread leaving her *sabots* outside the gate.

Felix found the change most grateful. He had worked successfully that day and with two studies in oil propped up against the low box hedge, was begging a criticism from Ben.

Little Celeste had posed for him mornings and afternoons all the week and the canvases were the result of his work. He had chosen two motives from the life of the Virgin. In one she sat working at a quaint embroidery frame against the old rose vine. In the other she stood as the Virgin of Wisdom against a hedge of roses holding a half opened book. Seven white doves fluttered about her head.

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Celeste loved to pose, most of all as the Virgin about whom she talked incessantly.

Once he stopped work and turning upon her laughed aloud. "Praying for me Celeste? Dear me! I reckon you haven't counted the cost. I am beyond redemption. I am bad; very bad."

Celeste looked at him with surprised, incredulous eyes and shook her head emphatically. "*Non Monsieur!* That is not true. You are good if you are a heretic. But it is not only because you are a heretic that I pray for you. The Blessed Virgin is interceding that you may be well. I go to Our Lady of the Valley every morning and beg her to cure you. It is so near." She nodded her head towards the little chapel just beyond the garden wall. "You should go and pray. You can be well and strong if you will. Look at me! I prayed that the water would heal me and it did."

Felix became grave. "Ah, my little one; it cannot be. God knows I wish it could." He sighed and drew meaningless hieroglyphics upon the polished surface of his palette with a wet sable brush.

"If God knows you wish it, it can be done, for he can do anything," persisted Celeste with earnest entreating eyes.

"Ah well; so let us hope; there's no harm in that," and again he was lost in some problem of form or color.

There was a long silence. "You must do more than hope," Celeste was once more speaking. "Even believing is not enough. You must *know* the power of God to

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heal. Our blind little Marie *knows* God's power; she will be healed at the shrine where I was healed."

Felix looked up again from his work. He was studying her face. She looked the Virgin of Wisdom. "And when will this happen little one?" He whistled softly and walked back a few steps to better view his work.

"The second Tuesday in August, Monsieur."

"Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

Felix started and Celeste gave a little cry as the words uttered in rich vibrant tones broke the stillness of the garden.

The Swami had found the door in the wall ajar and screened by the shrubbery had come upon them unawares.

He noticed Felix's eyes light with a glad welcome and motioned him not to put down his palette but to keep on working. "I bring you a message. We have some new manuscripts at Silleron. Come over and see them."

"You wonder that a priest of India quotes your Bible?" He turned to Celeste with kindly eyes. "Ah my little one, I love truth wherever I find it and I had to seal and strengthen your little sermon with one of the greatest truths ever uttered by Christ. It is this pure, child-like acceptance of truth that has transformed weak men into giants, slaves into rulers, painters into prophets."

His hand rested reassuringly upon Felix's shoulder as he uttered the last few words; then he sought the cool shade of the little vine-covered arbor where he sat with bared head watching Felix paint.

Felix never knew how long he remained there for,



"Where the water-cresses grow."

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stimulated by the Swami's sympathetic presence, he worked with new hope, new strength.

From time to time the Swami's musical voice would blend in like a wonderful undercurrent of inspiration urging him on and on until when he turned away from his picture he found that the Hindu had gone, and the afternoon was spent, with long spindling shadows creeping across the garden.

Ben came and stopped him. After the brushes had been washed and Celeste had departed they lighted their pipes and went over the day's work with critical eyes.

Their little domain was a world of itself. Only the birds and tall poplars could see within, so high were the moss-covered walls of their stronghold. Here they could work in *plein air* free from the petty annoyances to which the village *gamins* subjected them when they worked outside. They had become unusually troublesome of late.

"I really believe somebody is egging them on," said Ben. "Why, that little girl of the blacksmith's was always a treasure and to-day she scowled like a little imp and spat at me when I offered her a sou."

"I have noticed it too," said Felix. "Who do you suppose is setting them against us? Hello! What is that?"

Ben took his pipe out of his mouth and listened. They heard the sound of many children's voices shouting and jeering, accompanied by the rattling of tin cans and the sharp yelps of a dog.

"That sounds wonderfully like Jack," said Ben as they turned to the gate. "What can they be up to?"

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As he lifted the latch and swung the gate open, Jack came dashing in with his tail between his legs, an old coffee pot dangling from his collar. He was followed by Alina dragging a screaming urchin by the collar of his torn and dirty shirt. Her usually calm face was red with righteous indignation.

"What shall we do with him? He has been stoning Jack."

"Here Ben! Take him! Look out! He kicks like a steer!"

Ben held the boy out at arm's length while he gyrated about, kicking and fuming in vain.

"We can't punish him," said Ben, "his parents would stone us if we did. I will take him to Bellemaire; they fear the Mayor more than they do us."

"Here Felix—take my pipe! Now Alina; I want you for witness. Bring along Jack and the coffee pot."

Before they had reached the market place where was Bellemaire's little chemist shop, all the gamins of Bréport had fallen into the ranks of this remarkable procession.

Bellemaire greeted them with kindly, twinkling eyes although his bushy brows looked fierce and foreboding. He stood resting both hands upon the counter with a formidable array of antiquated pots, jars, and scales about him.

"The Americans are in trouble! What can I do for them? The gamins have stoned Mademoiselle's dog? Shocking! *Attendez!*"

He drew them all out to the front door step where their followers had congregated—"Listen gamins!" his

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eyebrows looked fiercer than ever as he addressed the open-mouthed crowd. "The Americans are our peaceful guests. He who annoys them again goes to St. Valery between the gendarmes!" His words were forceful even to the Americans, who had once seen a peasant ushered out of Bréport between two of these gorgeously uniformed, and superbly mounted officers of the law.

"*Enfin*, Jean—go to your mother! You throw no more stones!" Bellemaire pushed the frightened boy from him, who, with his companions quickly disappeared around the corner of the Grain Hall.

Bellemaire would not listen to their thanks. "No! No!" he waved them off. "I only do my duty. But if the Americans ever need beer in *schops* or syphons of mineral water or fine drugs, Bellemaire is at their service." He rubbed his hands cheerfully and backed into his little shop.

"Bellemaire is all right," said Felix.

"I should say he was," exclaimed Ben. "The *Maitre* tells me that when the Prussians were here in the 'seventies, they had to put a revolver to his head before he would order his citizens to supply provender."

As they passed through the town the small boys doffed their caps and Jack scampered where he would unmolested, but there were low mutterings and shrugging of shoulders among the groups of peasants who stood before the doors of their *chaumières*.

"The Americans are not contented with ruling their own, they must needs rule the world. *A bas les cochons Américains!*"

Chapter XVIII

THE wide, hard, highway shone white in the sun. Small hoof beats, a jangling bell, the rumble of Père Boudin's donkey cart as it toiled up the slope towards Silleron were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the hot July morning.

In the cart sat Ben, carefully shielding a large, newly stretched canvas as the vehicle jolted along. He had been forced to accept the company of the loquacious postman as he expected to make a week's visit at Silleron and somebody must needs bring back the donkey to Bréport. He was on his way to paint a portrait of the Swami.

Boudin kept up a continuous chatter. It was his habit to collect news as he dispensed letters, so he was ever ready to gossip with man, woman or child.

"One tells me that the Comte de Baigneur has paid Monsieur five thousand francs for his portrait!" He shifted the weed in his mouth and eyed his companion sideways.

"Ah?" replied Ben, looking up the road unconcernedly where he could see the figure of a young peasant woman approaching with a prawn net over her shoulder.

"One says that Monsieur is of a very rich family; indeed one has said that Monsieur will marry M^{lle} Durlan."

"Ah?" Ben moved uneasily in his seat and reaching out a foot gave the donkey a vicious kick. As the beast bounded ahead, they came suddenly upon the young

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woman with the fishing net. She was young and pretty. Ben recognized the face instantly although he had never seen it in the flesh before.

"A pretty girl, Jacques Potin's daughter!" Boudin jerked his thumb over his shoulder and winked knowingly. "But she would go to Paris and by my faith what do they become when they carry faces as pretty as hers with them? They say she lived with an American painter but who can know? It is most likely hearsay." He once more glanced sideways at Ben whose face might have been carved in wood.

"Ah?" As he again uttered the one short word he administered a sharp kick at the donkey. The animal sprang forward with a snort. Père Boudin all but fell backwards over the tail board. The rest of the journey was passed in silence.

Lili had cast one quick glance upwards as the cart passed, then her eyes fell and remained glued to the highway until the sound of the wheels had died away in the distance.

When she looked up again it was with the fierce eyes of a hunted animal. Père Boudin's insulting look was but one of many such that greeted her wherever she went, but most often in her father's smoky little café where she was made to serve drinks from time to time.

Even that morning, malicious lips had whispered calumny into her ear. The poisonous gossip of her father's tap-room had made violent jealousy gnaw at her heart. "They are alone—alone!" she groaned as she saw Ben driving away from Bréport and again wild,

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unreasoning jealousy made her breathe rapidly as she shifted the net pole to the other shoulder and trudged down the hill towards Bréport. Poor, untutored Lili; born of a class not far removed from the cattle of the fields, she could put but one interpretation upon love. To her it was but a whirlwind of desire; a maelstrom of unbridled passion. What wonder that she was jealous. What wonder that these foul suspicions poured into her ears, filled her poor head with a host of lurid imaginings.

When, as a last resort Lili took up her abode among these toilers of the soil, she found that she too must work, or else submit to her father's taunts and curses.

There were two alternatives; the café its insults and blows with the continuous company of Potin and his fellow sots, or the mackerel boats of Sotteville.

As many other unhappy souls have done, Lili went down to the sea. At first the fisher folks derided her tender white hands and many little ways unconsciously acquired in Paris, but she was soon able to take a hand at an oar or haul in a seine with the best of the women who for the most part were coarse, unsexed creatures, whose hoarse voices could hardly be distinguished from those of the fishermen.

She sailed with Père Dalot an old fisherman who lived in a little hut not far from her father's *auberge*. His storm-beaten boat had weathered so many tempests, that it was a common saying among the fisher-folk that "*l'Etoile de Mer*" would, with her master, last forever. She had sailed out of Sotteville since the earliest recollections of the oldest inhabitants.



“—As other unhappy souls have done, Lili went down to the sea.”

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There were days when Dalot's boat would be beached. These were the days that she most dreaded. Anything but the hated *auberge*. She would cast about for work to do that would keep her away from home.

Potin was a *gourmand*; this Lili knew. She also knew his weakness for prawns. So it chanced that *l'Etoile de Mer* is beached this morning and Lili on her way to the shore to fish for prawns.

She kept to the highway until the Leper's Road was reached. Here she stopped for a moment. The temptation was strong to turn in and follow it down to the chapel; to lie below the high wall of Felix's garden and hear his ringing laugh once more. But no! That would never do! She might have to wait for an hour and she must be back with the basket of prawns by *déjeuner* or there would be blows and curses from Potin. So she left the highway and skirting the town soon reached the beach.

The tide was low. She seated herself upon a bunch of sea-weed and kicking off her *sabots*, slipped a piece of string through the holes in the heels and hung them about her neck. Then pulling off her *chaussons* and stockings she stuffed them into the *sabots*. She caught up her skirt in a way that allowed her to wade to her knees without hindrance.

As she seized her prawn net and started down the rock-strewn, weedy beach, a cry at her back made her turn quickly.

"Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! Do not go away! Can you not pose for us? We will pay you well!" Two

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of Rouvier's followers, one a man in corduroys, the other a woman in a gaudy pink and red beach gown were gesticulating from the shadow of the towering chalk cliff. The woman's gown was so gorgeous, so Parisian as to make Lili's mouth set in hard lines. She realized that plumage of this sort was no longer hers.

She regarded them for a moment only, then with a shrug of the shoulders she turned away frowning. "*Non! Je ne pose pas!*" She muttered the words bitterly, while the fierce, hunted look came into her face once more.

Pushing the net through the shallow water, she followed the shore for an hour, patiently picking her way through shale and over occasional stretches of sandy beach, only stopping to slip the crisp, shining prawns into the basket. She went on and on until her basket felt heavy and she found herself before the Smugglers' Gorge.

Throwing herself upon the beach she wiped her feet with her apron and putting on her stockings and sabots once more, parted the thick shrubbery which closed the mouth of the gully and climbed upwards through the brush. As she neared the top she quickened her steps. There was a look of uncurbed expectation in her face. She hurriedly crossed the stubbly plain, bounded down the bank to the Dieppe highway and was soon crossing the little green before the chapel of Our Lady of the Valley.

The Leper's Road or Felix's lane? Which should it be? She stood in a quandary, her face working with various emotions. The bell of St. Martin's was striking.

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She counted the strokes—"Only ten o'clock?" She uttered a little sigh of relief and turned towards the walled cottage with an expression of pleasurable anticipation.

Throwing herself down close under the wall in the deep shadow of some shrubbery she listened and waited—waited and listened for how long? It seemed an age. At last she heard it—yes—the same, dear sweet laugh, and she clasped her hands against her breast, the great tearful, lustrous eyes half closed, an ecstatic smile upon her lips.

Poor soul; she was contented with so little. Suddenly she heard another laugh—the laugh of a woman. She was on her feet in an instant with wide eyes and parted lips—"Mon Dieu! What agony!" She must see for herself—she must settle this thing which had been whispered this very morning—which burned in her brain like a demon fire.

Her eyes traveled over the great expanse of smooth wall, then across the lane to the two Lombardy poplars which Felix had often likened to the spires of St. Clotilde.

The possibility was no sooner mirrored in her eyes than it was acted upon. With noiseless, catlike movements she slipped off her *sabots* then her *chaussons* and stole across the lane in her stocking feet, always alert and watchful.

Using the tree as a screen, she crept upwards clinging not only with feet and hands, but with teeth as well. Occasionally a brown hand would part the silver-backed

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leaves and a pair of half frightened but determined eyes would peer downwards. No; not yet—she must go higher—still higher.

With every nerve and muscle set at a terrible tension, more and more cautiously she climbed and climbed until at last the swaying of the tree told her that she was nearing the top. There were barely enough branches to screen her from the garden. Again she heard his voice and a soft light came into her eyes; then she deftly and eagerly parted the leaves.

At first the warm glow of the noontide sunlight upon box, flower beds and pebbly walk blinded her; then she descried just within the deep, leafy cavity of the vine-covered arbor, that which her hungry, jealous eyes sought.

Felix was stretched at full length upon the wooden bench, his chin in his hand, his elbow embedded in a cushion. He was looking over Alina's shoulder.

She had thrown herself upon the ground Turk-fashion, her lap filled with a lot of rare prints that Ben had bought in an old shop on the Quai Voltaire. Her back rested against the bench and the noble head was so near Felix that his breath stirred the golden-brown strands which had escaped their confinement and were riotously tumbling over the seat.

A touch, a look, a sigh meant so much to him and now he denied himself all for her sake. Yet as she picked out a new print and studied it with absorbed gaze, he cautiously, reverentially caught up a strand of the waving hair and caressing it with look and touch pressed

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it to his lips while she, all unconscious, turned to point out something that she had discovered in the print.

There was a cry—more a moan than a cry which neither of them heard. The throbbing, clinging figure at the tree top seemed about to fall.

To the impure all things partake of impurity. The suspicions of a sensual mind are limitless.

Lili's face became livid; all the strength went out of her arms; her hold was loosening—No! she must not—must not fall. He must not know that she had seen them.

She clung with a blind instinct, her pale face upturned to the sky, her eyes closed. At last, with the color in her cheeks came her strength, but her eyes burned with the baneful fire of jealous hatred.

At last she clasped the great trunk, for she was near the ground and burying her face in the leaves wept bitter tears. Then she set her teeth and frowned. "No! I hate—hate—*hate* him!" She dropped to the grassy bank reeling from exhaustion. As she started to cross the lane, a hand fell upon her shoulder. A guilty, fearful pallor overspread her face. She turned to meet a pair of cunning, greenish gray eyes.

"Hush! Tell me quick! What did you see? Quick I say!" Miss Dolchester shook her roughly.

Lili jerked herself free and retreating backwards a few steps eyed the intruder suspiciously. With an angry scowl she silently turned towards the spot where she had left her net and basket. Miss Dolchester picked up her paint box and followed, baffled but persistent, her mouth closed determinedly.

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Lili slipped on her *chaussons* and *sabots* in silence and swinging the strap of her prawn basket over her shoulder started down the lane closely followed by Miss Dolchester.

As she turned into the Leper's Road and quickened her steps, the same firm hand seized her arm and she was whirled about as upon a pivot.

"Answer me! I demand it! We can talk here. They cannot hear us." Miss Dolchester nodded her head towards the walled garden.

With blazing, wrathful eyes Lili again shook her off. "Who are you? What matters it to you what I saw? No! I will tell you nothing!" She turned and was off again, her companion dogging her steps.

They traversed the entire length of the Leper's Road. "Listen—here is money! You *shall* answer me or I will tell him where I found you to-day!" Miss Dolchester again stood in her path.

"Curse your money—No!" Lili struck at it. The gold piece went spinning across the high road ringing as it fell in a pile of stones. "Tell him if you like; but he will say you lied!" She turned on her heel and was gone.

Miss Dolchester stood for a moment watching the rapidly disappearing figure, her thin lips set in a hard line, her eyes shifting restlessly. Then she turned to the pile of stones and searched for the gold piece.

As Lili passed the vine-covered arbor where Potin held his court during the hot season, she started and frowned; his hoarse, guttural voice greeted her in wheed-

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ling accents. "*Holà! Ma chérie!* What have you brought for *déjeuner*? Come; show us!"

She looked up questioningly as he uttered the last words to meet the covetous glance of Potin's companion, a shock headed, square jawed youth who made a place for her upon the bench beside him.

Ignoring his action, Lili stood holding out the basket of prawns with surly, downcast eyes. Potin looked into the basket with the air of a glutton while his companion stared at Lili.

"Fine large ones! *Regardez Auguste!*" Potin fished out a big shining prawn and held it up for his companion's inspection. It wriggled in his fingers and fell to the ground. Lili stooped to pick it up. Auguste also reached for it. Her soft brown locks brushed his cheek. With a savage laugh he threw his arms tight about her waist and kissed her again and again.

As he released her she stood for a moment panting. Potin laughed hoarsely and slapped his thigh, but sprang to his feet with an oath as the sound of three sharp blows—flesh striking flesh, rang through the place. She would have struck and struck until the paroxysm of fury had been spent, but Auguste hid his face in his arm and a numbing blow from behind sent her reeling across the yard.

Potin laughed a Satanic laugh at what he had done, and shook his fist after her as she staggered into a door.

"The miserable minx! She shall obey me! Curse her! She *shall* obey!" He struck the table a blow which made the glasses jump into the air and fall together with

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a crash. The two men sat face to face, Auguste still smarting from her sudden onslaught, Potin showing his broken teeth like some wild beast, his anger only half spent.

"I tell you she shall, Auguste! Bah—only think! You a *rentier*, an honest man willing to make her your wife, and she with no dowry—*Nom d'un cochon!* She is a *gobemouche*—a blockhead!"

"It is easy enough to say she shall." Auguste rubbed his smarting cheeks disconsolately. "She is *impossible!*"

"Listen! Would you know why?" Potin leaned across the table, and tapped his companion on the shoulder with two fingers. "Why? The *American* of course!"

"The American? The one who pitched me into the horse-trough last fête day?"

"The same!"

"Curse him!"

"So say I! Curse him to Hell—eternal Hell! Listen!" Potin caught the collar of Auguste's blouse and whispered into his ear. "She loves him—her betrayer. She told me so once when she thought she was dying. She will have nothing of you. She will listen to nobody until——"

"Until——" Auguste repeated the word, the fire of jealous hatred flaming his sullen face. "Ah yes; until——"

"*He is dead!*" The men sprang to their feet in confusion, overturning bottles and glasses as the words ut-



Lili

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tered in a hoarse whisper, came from somewhere at their backs.

Then they turned again as a figure darkened the entrance of the arbor and a low laugh greeted their ears.

"*Bonjour Monsieur Potin!*" Miss Dolchester stood smiling with out-stretched hand. "Will you and your friend drink with me? I am thirsty. I have walked from Bréport and these traps are heavy." She threw them down and seated herself, quite ignoring the suspicious glances of the two peasants.

"Give me some brandy—a big glass and a syphon! See that the syphon is cold and Messieurs, what is yours to be?" She looked up at the low browed brutes with a seductive smile, holding out her cigarette case invitingly.

Their poor thick heads were addled by these unwonted courtesies. They sheepishly helped themselves to cigarettes. Auguste fumbled over the fallen bottles trying to right them while Potin became the obsequious host as best he knew how and hurried away for the brandy and syphon.

"Ho; Monsieur Potin!" cried Miss Dolchester as he appeared with the drinks. "Père Boudin tells me that you are a *bon garçon*. If that be true you can do me a great service and in the meantime gain three francs a day—*Non, mon ami!* Don't look like that!" She laughed familiarly as she poured out the brandy and filled the glass brimming full from the sparkling syphon. "It is only to sit at yonder table as you sit every day and let

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me paint you. *Sapristi!* but you are a magnificent type Monsieur!" There was such admiration in her glance that Potin looked foolish and awkwardly rubbed his bristling chin with the back of his hand. He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Eh bien!* As you will Mademoiselle; when do we commence?"

"Now!"

"Ah! but Mademoiselle forgets it is the hour of *déjeuner.*"

"*N'importe!* *Après déjeuner* if you will. It will answer quite as well, the light is always the same in the arbor."

* * * * *

"Is it true that you have lived in America? The head a little more to the right. There stay so! Ah; Monsieur Jacques, you pose well." Miss Dolchester regarded Potin with her head tilted to one side as she measured the relative proportions of his massive shoulders and bullet-like head marking it off with her thumb on a brush handle held out at arm's length.

"America?" He frowned fiercely. "Yes—*malheureusement* I have lived with the swine; the *canaille*; the dregs of the earth. I bought the good will of a café in South Fifth Avenue. Does Mademoiselle know New York? No? Ah, then I can forewarn you. One goes there to be robbed. Name of a dog! They are a nation of cheats, thieves, cut-throats!" He struck the table a resounding blow.

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She smiled insidiously. "Ah, too bad—too bad, but Monsieur forgets that he is posing. The body to the right; the head to the left. There! that will do. So Monsieur no longer loves the Americans?"

"*Love* them?" He burst into a roar of demoniacal laughter. "Can one love a snake? a rat? a hyena? an American pig? No! No! Mademoiselle. I hate them. Listen! I chose to punish my wife on the steamer! A tow-headed American knocks me down. I come back here and persuade the Comte de Baigneur to give me a farm on the credit plan. I choose to beat my horse one day, when the American hussy, she who lives with Mère Fouchet, tries to stop me. *Nom d'un cochon!* Of course I horsewhipped her, then the Count turns me out of my farm because I beat ladies on the highway.

"My daughter goes to Paris. The tow-headed American betrays her. She comes back here and Auguste offers to marry her *sans dot*. Think of it! Marry a penniless girl who——" He raised his eyebrows and gave an inconsequential shrug "a girl who has made her little mistakes—*la voilà!* The minx will not so much as look at Auguste and why?" His face flushed with vindictive hate "Because of the tow-headed American of course. He always crosses my path. She adores him. She would lick the dust off his boots. Curse him! Curse him!" He beat the air with his huge fist.

The cold, cruel face bending over the palette wore an exultant, satisfied smile. She industriously puddled some blue and red paint into a semblance of mud and forgot to touch the canvas for some moments.

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She looked up finally with the same crafty, fulsome smile. "You do well to hate the Americans Monsieur, but please turn your head to the right. No, not so far. There—that will do." She worked in silence for a while then started up and backed away from the easel, studying her canvas as she walked. "Yes; I understand. You would marry your daughter well. Ah; what a pity that the American should stand in your way. Auguste would pay up your old debts and you would be happy again. Ah yes; it is a great pity." She looked up to see the wicked fire which she fed burn more and more fiercely.

"A pity! A pity! You should be rid of him." She again turned her attention to the canvas, tilting her head from side to side with half closed eyes. "A strange accident, the passing of the coast guard last week?" She looked up again questioningly.

"Picked up dead on the beach. What of it?" snarled Potin, his wrath still at boiling point.

"They say he walked off the cliff in the night; lost his path." She was again working industriously. "But who knows; he may have had an enemy. How easy it would be to steal up behind and push him off. People would say he walked off in the night—an accident. His assailant would never be caught."

"Easy enough!" Potin scowled impatiently, "but what of it?"

She once more seated herself and fixed her eyes upon her work, the old sinister smile merged into a look of

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such heinous, livid hate that Potin forgot to pose and leaned forward listening in open-mouthed wonderment.

“The American often walks alone on the cliff at night—do you understand now?” She started to her feet. Their eyes met.

“So then—you too hate the American?” She felt his foul breath upon her cheek as he eagerly whispered the words in her ear. The discolored broken teeth were disagreeably near. She involuntarily drew back, but their eyes met in a perfect understanding and the silent compact was sealed.

Chapter XIX

BOOKS there were in such redundancy that the gorged shelves could hold no more, while every inch of floor-space not needed for foot-room had its quota of volumes.

The library of Silleron had become an inspiration to Felix. At first he had loved it because of the high, vaulted ceiling, the great canopied chimney-piece with the arms of the Baigneur family sculptured upon its face, the antiques of all races, all times, that covered the walls and cabinets. Felix had the true artist's love for anything old which bore the imprint of man's originality.

He had in the course of his many visits come to love the musty, half obliterated manuscripts of papyrus, parchment, crumbling time stained paper, which littered the great oaken table.

In the beginning these manuscripts had bored him. He had been content to steal quietly about the room studying sculptured marble and wood, beaten gold or graven steel, while the Count and Hindu worked.

But from time to time the Swami would translate some truth written by a sage thousands of years before and they would launch forth into a discussion in which Felix would join in his own impulsive way, discovering a truth here or a dogma there as though the two philosophers who regarded him with kindly eyes had not discovered these same truths years before.

"Your horizon is widening," the Count smilingly ex-

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claimed one day as they were leaving the library after a particularly interesting hour. "Man's spiritual and artistic development depends absolutely upon where he fixes his mental horizon. The dogmas of the world choke, blind, paralyze man. They narrow down his horizon until he thinks and acts as a puppet, not as an untrammelled soul. That is why I left the church of Rome!"

The Count's voice had been raised to an unusually high pitch, his finely chiseled face was lighted by the enthusiasm of the moment. He had but just locked the library door, his voice still echoing along the hall-way when the sound of another voice made Felix halt and turn a wondering face to the Count.

As though in direct contradiction to his host's words, this vigorous barytone voice chanted the service of the Church of Rome.

Felix had often noticed that the Château possessed a chapel but naturally supposed it to be abandoned as the Count had never referred to it by word or action.

He saw the wonderment in Felix's face. There was a tinge of sadness in his tones. "I am the black sheep of a long line of devout Catholics. My only brother is a Cardinal at Rome. My dear mother would have made a priest of me. She was a rare mother—the one love of my life."

The Count pointed sadly in the direction from whence came the sound of the chanting voice.

"It was her wish. She made me promise as I stood by her death bed that the sacraments of the Church should

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be administered in the Chapel of Silleron as they had been administered for five hundred years. So for her sake I have this young priest here once a week to keep alive the traditions of the Church, while I myself, am turning the search-light of a truth loving age upon these same traditions. The Church's Messiah said a man cannot serve two masters, so you find in me an amazing anomaly."

"The whole of Christendom is one huge anomaly!" murmured the Swami "You are no more inconsistent than our painter here who allies himself with a school of so-called Realists who paint the deformities of a sensuous humanity and call it Truth. What then is the beautiful, the chaste, the ideal, the spiritual? Bah—were there ever such perversion?"

Felix listened with lowered eyes. At that moment, beneath the spell of those scathing words it seemed indeed perversion.

"True," said the Count "that is why, when I remodeled the chapel as a memorial to my mother I chose a symbol painter, an idealist who was vilified and persecuted by the French school until discouraged, unsupported, actually without food, he threw himself into the Seine. I believe I possess his greatest work."

The Count held up a warning hand as they neared the end of the corridor and carefully turned the knob of a door. There were but three steps downwards and Felix found himself in a gallery extending across one of the chapel walls.

He was conscious of a wealth of Gothic carving, the

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tapers dimly flickering upon the altar, the officiating priest. There were apparently no windows, but his eyes turned involuntarily to the source of a limpid, opaline light which flooded the place with a pure phosphorescent-like glow.

He knew instantly that this light was as unlike the glow of stained glass as moonlight is unlike the ruddy fire. His eyes rested upon a spot above the altar and as he looked there came into them a great wonderment approaching adoration. They drank and drank at the source of light as though they would never be content.

He saw a host of yearning, suffering beings. The agonized, the sick, the despairing. They were reaching, pushing, straining every nerve to creep within the pure, calm, peaceful effulgence of this wondrous light.

Upon the faces of those who had already reached the goal there rested a deep abiding peace, the like of which he had never seen.

"The Light of the World! The divine radiance of God. You chose your subject well. You chose your artist well. He was a master!" The Swami turned to the Count.

"Aye! That he was—poor Duchâtel. It was his own idea, lighting the canvas in that way."

"Duchâtel?" Felix awoke from his day dream with a start. He turned to the Count with scoffing, incredulous eyes—"Why, Duchâtel was a crank! A fool! An——"

"Ecstasist! Yes; it was he. A pity that there are not more fools. Could Duchâtel have seen your face only a

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moment ago he would have wept for very joy. Look! did you ever see light painted before?"

Felix's eyes followed the Count's gesture. "No, never!" he murmured in humbled, reverential tones. Then the consciousness of a great wrong done surged over him. He saw again the little black push cart on the Paris quay. He remembered the fisherman's heartless smile—his reply—"Nobody in particular! Only another *imbécile* painter!"

He thought of how Duchâtel had been hounded, ridiculed, wounded, driven to the Seine by Rouvier, Boschet and the 'Realists.' He thought of his own scornful words as he stood that day upon the quay—"Poor fool of a Duchâtel!"

He turned, the Swami was speaking.

"Does he not paint reality, he who paints Light—God—the Principle of Truth? Why then do you paint sordid, animal man in all his monstrous hideousness and call yourselves Realists? Do you—you—a Realist——"

"No! No! Don't call me that!" Felix raised a protesting hand "No—not here! Not now!"

The Swami's sentence was never finished, but as they left the chapel and wandered out into the sunlight there was a look of contentment in the calm depths of his kindly eyes, for Felix had awakened to a realization of what a fallacy his art had been.



The Old Weaver's Cottage.

Chapter XX

THEY left the great court by the monumental, triple-arched gateway, and seated themselves upon a stone seat heavily cushioned with dry moss which commanded a view of the long, broad avenue with its double rows of oaks and chestnuts.

In the vista were the scattered chimneys and purplish gray roofs of the village of Silleron.

Felix traced the lazy upward course of a column of blue smoke which rose from a small *chaumière* somewhat removed from the rest.

While his eyes followed the smoke, his inner consciousness was alive to all that had transpired in the chapel. He would hear more of Duchâtel. He would know how and when the Count had found him.

The Count following Felix's gaze seemed to interpret his thoughts, for he raised a hand and pointed at the column of smoke.

"Had it not been for her who builds yonder fire, Duchâtel would never have gone to Paris—never have died in the Seine. What? You never knew that he came from Normandy? Ah yes; Duchâtel was a true Norman. He loved the *chaumières*, the sound of the loom and the wooden shoe. He loved the very smell of the colza fires. He was a peasant at heart if his father had been the last of a long line of *notaires*.

"A good boy was Duchâtel—too good for the village

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boys who never understood him. They teased him to the point of distraction.

"The widow Duchâtel would bring him to the chapel to mass. He loved the music, the mystery, the symbolism. He often came alone. This pleased my dear, devout mother who must needs make a priest of him. The one desire of the widow Duchâtel's life was that he should take Holy orders and so one day he left Silleron.

"When he came back in priestly robes he was grown to manhood and alas; to manly beauty. He had those dark, dreamy eyes which seem not to see, yet see and feel and suffer.

"Stories of his wonderful talents followed him to Silleron. They had called him the Fra Angelico of the monastery. He had painted wonderful pictures upon the walls of the refectory.

"My mother secured the living of our little parish for him. When not at mass or visiting the sick, he painted always, as one inspired. Upon the chapel walls I found Holy Families, Crucifixions, Assumptions.

"I paid but little heed, only knowing that he worked without models. Yet one day as I studied these pictures more carefully, I noticed a strange fact. While the Christs, the Josephs, the Apostles varied in type, the Mary at the manger, the Magdalen at Christ's feet, the Virgin of the Assumption were variations of the same face and that an earthly one of to-day.

"The face was familiar but I could not place it. A fear haunted me all through that day. It still troubled

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me at sundown as I approached the wood of Blossville on my return from a visit at Bréport.

"Turning abruptly into the disused path which leads to Silleron, I came upon two figures walking hand in hand as lovers walk. Their faces were bent earthwards. I knew the cassock and broad hat. My foot struck a loose stone. The priest dropped the woman's hand as though it had been molten. He never looked up, but there was shame in his every movement. The woman's shameless gaze met mine unflinchingly. She knew full well her power. *Mon Dieu!* What a power is woman's!

"The following morning I went to the chapel. I must see again the faces that she had inspired. The pictures were gone. A ruthless hand had torn them from their mouldings.

"There was no mass that day. The poor widow Duchâtel found his hat and cassock lying across his undisturbed bed when she called him in season for early mass.

"Poor Duchâtel! How he trusted and loved that woman. Her one ambition was to be a *Parisienne*, so to Paris they fled. He made her his wife, but to what purpose? That she might drag him lower and lower and then—one day he came home to find her gone with another."

"Gone?" Felix unconsciously repeated the one tragic word with a husky voice. "Poor—poor Duchâtel!" There was measureless compassion in his tones.

Duchâtel's mistakes had also been his. They were bound by a bond which made them akin.

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The Ecstasist had then been no colorless, unsexed fanatic. He felt humiliated when he remembered how Ben had shielded him, coaxed him back to life and—Duchâtel? Who gave him aught but jeers and insults? Yet he had struggled up through the clinging quagmire of despair and had given the world a vision of Heaven—The Light of the World.

It was grand—heroic! Felix turned towards the chapel. He could see its gray buttresses and gargoyles through the line of trees. His face again lighted with inspiration. There was then hope for him.

“Duchâtel never came back.” continued the Count. “The Church had excommunicated him. His art alone remained. It became his life, his hope. He shut himself up in an attic and painted.

“He became a purist. Cleansed by the scathing fire into which he as a priest had knowingly entered, he became the priest of a new creed—a creed that saw in art the culmination of all chastity, all purity.

“I chanced to be in Paris. I found him in his lonely attic at the one supreme moment of his life. He was working on yonder canvas!” The Count pointed towards the chapel.

“He saw neither brush nor canvas—only that Light, that wonderful Light. When I spoke he turned in astonishment for he knew not that I had entered. His face beamed—‘See! See!’ he cried, ‘Take it! Place it above the altar that I desecrated! It is my atonement!’”

The Count started up from the bench and silently

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paced the soft, velvety turf; then he halted and once more pointed at the column of blue smoke. "The woman lives in yonder hut because she is the mother of Duchâtel's child—the babe which she stole when she left him. It is my pleasure to support them. *Enfin*—shall we take our walk?" He laid a hand upon the Swami's shoulder.

As Felix left his companions and started homewards, he had an overwhelming desire to retrieve, to achieve, to create, and beneath all, like the skeleton at the feast, the dull prodding of conscience—the knowledge of the wrong done Duchâtel.

He was willing to atone for it, but how? It weighed heavily upon him as he paced the whole length of the great avenue with loitering steps. He always idled here. He loved the place. He, like Duchâtel, loved the very sounds of a simple peasant life which echoed between the long lines of patriarchal trees.

The clatter of an old weaver's hand loom ceased as he passed the door and a wrinkled, leathery face surmounted by a white-tasseled night cap peered forth and watched him out of sight.

There was the creak of a well windlass, the sharp slapping blows of a group of washerwomen who were beating their clothes along the banks of a tiny rivulet.

As he passed on, the rooks overhead cawed sharply, as if they knew that he was not to the manner born. Then he heard the muffled cry of an infant close at hand, mingled with the sounds of a sharp altercation

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carried on by two adults, the one a peasant woman, the other——. He stopped abruptly and listened. It was the only discordant note in the whole peaceful symphony.

An angry flush darkened his pale face. He knew the cold, relentless voice, the nasal English accent.

“Will you ruin the work of weeks? The child *must* sleep or I cannot paint her!”

“No! No! No more, Madame! You will kill her! See; she is like one dead! Stop! You shall not!”

He heard the sounds of a struggle. A chair was overturned. Something thrown over the hedge landed at his feet. It was an iron spoon. He reached downwards to pick it up. As he did so he scented a musty, pungent odor. “Laudanum!” he scowled as he muttered the word.

The cold, cruel voice went on, “We will see! What if I tell the Count of your latest *liaison*? Will he publicly support a woman of the town even though she be the widow of Duchâtel?”

Felix heard a cold, heartless laugh. “Then you will? I thought as much! *Chacun à son goût*! Yours is for the Count’s gold! Hand me that spoon and stop whimpering!”

Felix glanced upwards. Yes, it was the house which the Count had pointed out. He parted the straggling hedge and leaped through.

“The end justifies the means.” Miss Dolchester personified her favorite maxim as she leaned over the half-stupefied child, her cold, colorless face set in hard, determined lines. She,—egoist—realist—personified the



“Washer-women beating their clothes along the banks of a tiny rivulet.”

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brutal spirit which drove Duchâtel to the Seine. Even as she balanced the deadly phial and started to count the drops, her eyes sought the unfinished canvas with selfish abstraction.

Her subject was Fantine watching the sleeping Cosette. She had used her means well thus far, but the end was not yet attained. The fate of the picture depended upon whether the child slept for two more hours and that must be accomplished at any cost even if—she missed her count. The drops of laudanum blurred together. She smiled as she lowered the phial and glanced at the mother. A woman of the town. What would it matter? She would never miss the child. Why bother to count them all over? Handing the phial to the mother she raised the child's head. It moaned.

Felix had resolved to meet her calmly, coldly, but the sound of that moan drove him to madness.

Before Miss Dolchester could turn, the spoon was struck from her hand. Her arm was in a grip which brought forth a sharp cry of pain. He delighted in the sound. Why should a fiend incarnate not suffer in the very moment of her perfidy?

He led her out into the open air and dropped the arm with a gesture which left an angry sneer upon her thin lips.

She tried to speak, but there was that in his face which made her retreat backwards and glance to right and left as an animal does when at bay.

"God only knows who sent you to this cottage! Why did you choose Duchâtel's child? Was not Duchâtel

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enough of a sacrifice? Must his child be drugged to death to suit the whim of a Realist? To give the world a thing like that?" He pointed at the canvas which stood just within the door. "As though *that* were worth a life! No; this is your last *séance*—the last the law allows, for I shall see that the law punishes you if you come again! Duchâtel's child poses no more! Do you understand?"

She faced him in livid rage. "Ho! Ho! So you have turned Ecstasist?" Her shrill laugh echoed down the avenue.

"Felix Braxton the Realist! Felix Braxton the Bohemian—associate of Rouvier and the libertines turned Ecstasist! What a joke! He defends Duchâtel and all his progeny!" She snapped her paint-stained fingers in his face, "A penny for your morals and sermons! Curse you for ruining my Salon picture with your damnable hypocrisy!"

He did not heed her insults. He was wonderfully calm. He stood with folded arms while she gathered up her scattered brushes and colors.

"Here Madame Duchâtel, is what I owe you for posing! You will not need to pose your child any more!" She cast a meaning glance at Felix. "She has a father now and you a——"

She dared not utter the word. The frightened look was in her eyes again as she retreated to the gate.

Felix turned away with a shudder and entered the hut. He was trying to shake off the memory of a horrible night in Rouvier's garden.

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His face softened at sight of the sleeping child. With gentle movements he reached down and gathered her up in his arms. She moaned.

“Hush—hush—my little one!” He nestled her against his cheek. “You are safe now. No harm shall ever come to you while I live!”

There was a look of peace in his face. His atonement had been paid in part.

Chapter XXI

THE bell of St. Martin's struck twelve melodious strokes. Felix stopped to count them, then threw down his brushes with an exclamation of surprise. The morning already gone? He had worked with a joy in his eyes, a surety of touch never known before.

He could not forget yesterday. If his courage flagged for an instant, the Light of the World would flash into his consciousness and he would call himself a coward as he thought of Duchâtel's victory.

As he reluctantly turned his canvas to the wall, his eye encountered an unmailed letter lying upon the table. He must try to get it off by the noon post. He hurried down stairs and along the Leper's Road.

He did not stop at Mère Fouchet's. Alina and Ben had gone to Silleron. He kept on to the Market Square. Something out of the common was taking place. Groups of peasants stood about the square. On the terrace a number of them had mounted chairs and were peering in at the windows of the Chariot d'Or. As he stood for a moment near the café he heard two hoarse voices in noisy conversation.

"Not a deputy? Why then does he give away dinners? He has need of votes, *parbleu!*"

"No! No! *Imbécile!* He is a *grand poète*—a Republican! He does it for charity!"

"O ho; for charity! *Tiens—tiens!* Well he may—

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be he a Republican! Have we not starved ever since the Empire? What is he called?"

"Hugo—Victor Hugo—*stupide!* Have never heard of the *grand poète* of France?"

The old fisherman lifted his cap and scratched his grizzly head in perplexity. "Hugo—Hugo? Aye! Aye! to be sure! The captain of the potato boat saw him once in Guernsey—it is a long time since! He said the Emperor had sent him out of France. So he be a Republican? A pity that he is back again!

"*Oui! Oui!* There be too many Republicans in Bréport!"

"Victor Hugo in Bréport?" Felix accosted Père Boudin through the open window.

"*Certainement!* He comes to visit Paul Meurice—the play writer—you know the *châlet* with the terrace by the sea!" The letter carrier reached for his pouch with an officious air. "*Attendez, Monsieur!* Here it is—the notice. I cried it all over town yesterday, ah; then Monsieur was in Silleron and did not hear?"

He unfolded a soiled sheet and read in sing-song, nasal tones—

Citizens of Bréport, Seine Inférieure.

Monsieur Paul Meurice begs to announce that his distinguished guest Monsieur Victor Hugo will give a banquet to the poor children of Bréport, Silleron and Sotteville, to-morrow noon in the grand salle à manger of the Chariot d'Or, Bréport.

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"Would you see the *grand poète*? He is yonder!" Boudin nodded towards the dining-room.

Felix forgot to mail his letter. He mounted the terrace steps and climbing upon a chair craned his neck to see within.

Cabbage soup seven times a week, a rabbit stew now and then of a Sunday, is it to be wondered that a hundred piping voices shouted "*Vive Victor Hugo!*" at sight of *patés*, *vol-au-vents* and ices?

Felix could hear a voice. It was Bellemair's. The Mayor wore his tri-colored sash. He was thanking their host for his kindness. He was proud to address one who had been exiled for the Republic's sake.

When he had finished, an aged man rose to his feet. A rugged, seamed face stood forth from the crowd of happy young faces as a mighty, weather-worn oak stands forth from a forest of saplings.

The voice was weak. Felix could not hear. He saw the rough-hewn lines of the Titan face melt in the sunlight of a benign smile. It was all there, the pity, the Christ-like love of Jean Valjean.

Felix seemed to see the old well and little Cosette tugging at the water bucket as the great man reached downwards and taking a tiny peasant girl in his arms kissed and fondled her.

Felix crowded forward, a tender, eager look in his eyes.

"*Assez! Assez!* Do you want the whole Chariot d'Or?" A peasant jammed an elbow into his side, but he never heeded it, he was looking at the child. As she turned a laughing face towards the light he gave a con-



Victor Hugo and the children of "Bréport."

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tented sigh. Yes; it was Duchâtel's child—the little Cosette of yesterday.

He turned away. How the Titan face would have hardened in righteous fury had he witnessed that hateful travesty of Truth at Silleron.

"Realism! Truth——" he muttered as he thought of Miss Dolchester's picture, "A painted lie at the price of a life!"

* * * * *

Colored lights flashed upwards from the beach which lay below the châlet of Paul Meurice. The citizens of Bréport were honoring France's greatest immortal.

A cool ocean breeze fanned Felix's cheek as he lay in the tall grass at the cliff's edge watching the weird scene below. Close at hand was the paling which bounded the garden of the châlet. He heard a door open. There were footfalls and voices upon the terrace. A figure supported by two young girls tottered forth from the shadow into the lurid glare of red fire.

As he laid a hand upon the parapet and gazed seawards his gentle care-takers glided back into the gloom and he stood alone.

"Long live Victor Hugo! Long live the Republic!" the crowd below cheered and cheered.

The silent figure never moved. The massive, heroic face looked always seawards. In this ghoulis light it was sublimely picturesque.

Did the sight of the ocean, the sound of the waves recall the lonely island of his exile? Was he thinking of

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that other day when they had cried "*A bas Victor Hugo! Down with the Republic! Long live the Emperor!*"

As Felix crept nearer and nearer he saw in the Titan face the majesty, the grandeur of another, greater world where cycles are unnumbered. How trifling then the cheers of those who wished him a year or two more of the short span called life. What wonder then that he heeded them not until a slender girlish form came out again from the gloom and touching his hand pointed downwards. Then, after a little, Felix heard the faltering foot-falls once more. The chalet door closed, the colored lights died out, and he lay looking upwards at the cold, clear moon.

What a poor thing seemed his genius beside that colossal one.

Ah! but he was still young! Yes, but——. The old fearful look came into his eyes for a moment—only for a moment, though. He sprang to his feet—"Pshaw; I am a baby! The Swami is right—there is no death! Life is gigantic—eternal—sublime!" Fear? No; he feared nothing. Again the Swami was right—fear digs innumerable graves.

As he paced the deserted cliff road, he came upon the wayside crucifix. He thought of the night of his agony; of his confession, the comfort it had brought him, and with the thought came a wonderful happiness.

Her gentle caress at the foot of the cross had awakened in him a new love which brought with it a great peace. It was a love to be cherished, hoarded, not declared for selfish ends. A love which gave everything and asked

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nothing save the joy of living in the same world. He deserved no more.

He had all his life cherished an ideal of the woman he would love, but the passionate, unthinking first love came like a whirlwind, sweeping ideals aside.

In the intoxication of that moment he had thought Lili was all that he could desire. He even forgot social laws had been broken. Then came that awful awakening, ideals and faith in womankind tumbling to earth.

Now, through the blackness of his distrust there shone a pair of gray eyes so pure, so true, so honest as to shame his ideals to nothingness.

He was strangely calm. He wondered that this could be the passionate, sense-swayed Felix of other days.

No, he would demand nothing in return. No, before God she should never know it. This love would be his religion, his life.

He started homewards. The village was still once more. He must have remained a long time at the crucifix. As he passed Mère Fouchet's cottage he saw a light in Alina's window and murmured a fervent "God bless her!"

He turned into the Leper's Road. The moonlight silhouetted the rows of poplars, casting great serpentine shadows across the way. Presently he noticed somebody coming down the path towards him. It was a slight, phantom-like figure flitting from shadow to light, from light to shadow, but ever towards him.

Who could be abroad at this hour? When but a few paces away the figure halted a moment. He could see

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that it was a peasant girl. He uttered a cry as with a low moan she threw herself at his feet.

"Lili! You here? No! No!" He sprang backwards and tried to free himself as she clutched his knees, his waist, his neck, uttering fierce protestations of love.

"Felix! O Felix—take me back Felix! I betrayed you! I was a beast! But it is you—you—Felix, that I have always loved! O take me! Take me!"

The spell of the new love still upon him, he shook her off with a look of horror but escaped the fierce clutch of her arms only for a moment. He tried to deafen his ears to protestation that had once made him delirious with joy.

A great fear seized him. She was kissing his hands, his neck. The beautiful, softly-fringed eyes were so close to his that he closed his own and wrenched himself free with a cry of pain, but again and again she was upon him.

"Listen, Felix! Take me back Felix! I will give you my life! Listen, I beg of you!" A ray of hope lighted her face. "I will pose again! The Psyche will be finished! It will go to the Salon! You will have honors, riches, all because of Lili, your poor little Lili who will be your slave until death!"

At mention of the Psyche other promises uttered at the foot of the cross flashed into his consciousness and with this remembrance came surging back that joyful, unselfish love.

A marvelous calm possessed him. With wondering eyes she let him unlock the arms so tightly closed about

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his neck and suffered him to draw her to a seat upon a log by the roadside.

Then he began to pace the road as she had so often seen him do in those old happy days when he undertook to discipline her.

"Lili, I once took you sinfully—yes, it was sin, I know it now! I thought of you as my wife, but you betrayed me—disgraced me. True love is unselfish. True love never degrades."

His voice was gentle, persuasive.

"Would you drag me down again? Would you have me shunned by my dearest friends? Listen Lili! If you love me truly you would have me happy."

With a cry she once more clasped his knees, "I would! I would! The *bon Dieu* knows I would!"

He raised her to her feet and calmly looked into her face. "If you love me live a pure life for my sake! That will make me happy."

Lili stood with downcast eyes, her fingers working nervously; then with a piteous cry she threw herself upon the ground.

He turned away and hurried up the road. Once he glanced back. He could see the youthful figure in rough peasant garb lying prone beside the great log with hands extended clutching at the rough bark as she sobbed and moaned aloud.

Chapter XXII

AS Ben entered the walled garden one day, a strange picture met his gaze.

Felix sat upon a bench just outside the little arbor. Celeste knelt beside him, her clasped hands across his knees, her face raised imploringly to his.

"Has it come to this? I am astonished!" cried Ben with mock gravity.

Felix sprang to his feet with a quick laugh—"O, it is only that eternal pilgrimage. She is determined that I shall go."

"And so you shall! We are all going! The Count, the Swami, the *Maitre*, Alina, little Celeste and Marie. Everybody is going. The Count has only just discovered that Alina is a fine horse-woman. He says his hunters are stiff for want of exercise. He offers us two for the pilgrimage. Mère Fouchet will go as chaperon and you will look after her and the luggage in one of the Count's farm wagons. He thought you were not strong enough to ride. The Count and Swami will go by train; they haven't time to drive. You know they sail for America the day after the fête. They are going to the Psychical convention in Washington. Heigh ho! I shouldn't mind seeing America myself."

Felix lowered his eyes as Ben seated himself beside him. He could not meet his happy, ingenuous look for a moment. "Drive behind in a farm cart with Mère Fouchet?" There had been a time when he would



A corner of Bréport.

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have flushed with anger at the suggestion. Like most Virginians he was a fine horseman.

Ben did not know that the one absorbing desire of his life was to be beside Alina. Why should he know? Dear, unselfish Ben; so he smiled, and turning quietly to Celeste laid a caressing hand upon her shoulder saying, "My little one, the fates have settled it—I go!"

When Ben came home with the Count's kind offer Alina's joy surpassed all bounds. He had found her snugly fixed behind a great stack of straw, sketching a calf whose head she had gently but firmly lashed to an iron bar driven into the ground.

As Ben broke the news, calf, canvas, paints, were all forgotten. The uncleaned palette, colors, brushes, were bundled together helter-skelter and she made for home by the shortest lane, leaving Ben to liberate the calf. She burst in upon Mère Fouchet with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"O Little mother! Little mother! Can you believe it? I am to ride! Yes, really ride. No old farm horse but a beautiful thoroughbred, the Comte de Baigneur's mare. I saw her only yesterday. I never dared ask him, and now Ben has done it and we are to ride this very afternoon."

"And Monsieur Felix?" Mère Fouchet looked up with much meaning in her glance.

"Felix? Yes, of course Felix will ride. Poor Felix." She looked up with troubled eyes. "That was the difficulty at first. I refused point blank when Ben said Felix was not to ride. You see the Count thought him

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too ill, but I am sure he isn't. I sent Ben straight back to Silleron to ask for another horse."

She caught the old woman by her shoulders and planted a kiss upon each cheek. "Quick! Put an iron in the coals while I unpack my habit." They sponged and ironed it at the kitchen table. "O little mother, if we can't go to Heaven on horses I don't want to go for it is the most like Heaven of anything in this world."

So it transpired that for a week before their departure on the pilgrimage a farmer lad appeared daily at Mère Fouchet's gate with the horses. The mare came to know Alina so well that she would whinny and poke her nose over the hedge for sugar lumps that Alina would tuck away between the begging lips.

A fearless, beautiful, well habited woman on a well-bred, active horse is a sight for the gods. So thought Ben and Felix.

Color, form, action meant so much to them, and here they found it in its very quintessence. The eager gray-blue eyes, the dark delicately penciled brows, the red young lips parted just enough to show the pearly teeth within as she breathed deep and strong with the healthful exercise. The brown coil of hair with its glint of gold. The disorderly little strands that would always cut across her cheek and swish into her eyes in spite of all she could do; the very gesture with which she would dash these impertinent locks aside had in it a wanton grace.

Felix rode as he danced, with a vim that often out-distanced his companions as they cantered over the grassy

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by-roads. As they dismounted, a sickly pallor overspread his face and Ben saw his hand fly to the same old place over his heart.

Alina hurried to his side in tender alarm but Felix drew himself up with his old laugh. "Nonsense, I am all right! Only a little tired—that is all."

It was, however, his last ride. The next day the horses went back to Silleron unused. Nothing could persuade Alina to ride. The most eloquent pleadings of Felix, Ben's most common sense arguments were of no avail.

She spent the day with Felix, doing her utmost to make him forget his weakness. She pulled out sketch after sketch and study after study, picking out strong points in each with an enthusiasm that soon made Felix forget everything except his art and the beautiful earnest face before him. Her heart gladdened as he once more became his own, joyous, enthusiastic self, attacking a study of her head with all of his old-time vigor.

She posed for two hours never moving except to twist her suffering neck two or three times. She was thoroughly cramped and tired but he never knew it. She gave a grateful smile as he started up, overturning his stool and exclaimed "There—that will do Alina. I never did better in my life."

The next day when she and Ben had their ride, Felix never knew it for he had gone to the cottage loft and had once more unpacked the Psyche.

Alina shielded Felix as though he had been a sick and wilful child. "You see it wouldn't have done for us to have ridden yesterday," she explained to Ben with an

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odd little motherly air which she always assumed when speaking of Felix "he would have been so unhappy."

They were riding up a hillside, their hunters stretching out their long necks, nipping at an occasional wayside clover or an overhanging apple branch.

"He suffers so over things, poor boy. O Ben; if we could only rid him of that idea—it is so terrible. I always know when he is thinking of it, I can see it in his face."

"So can I," said Ben as he grimly struck an apple from a branch over his head and watched it go bowling along the road. "I was talking with the Swami about Felix only the other day. He calls him a genius. He says sublime possibilities are his. The greatness that comes to the few, but that he is dragged down by his senses—by fear, the nagging, subconscious fear that eats away a man's vitals while he may be ever so brave—aye—a hero! He says that Felix lives too much upon emotions, sensations, illusions. You know how he is either 'way up or 'way down. I know no braver soul than Felix, yet the Swami says that unless he conquers this fear he will surely die."

The horses were lazily climbing a warm hillside. Alina sat with slackened rein and downcast eyes, her forefinger thrust through the loop of her riding stick, which she twisted and untwisted abstractedly.

This was no new problem to her. She had needed no Hindu philosopher to tell her all this. Had she not lain with wide thoughtful eyes, night after night in her little

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white room, conjuring up plans whereby Felix might forget the doctor's death sentence.

Great hot tears welled to her eyes. She twisted and tugged at the riding stick in mad endeavor to keep them back. Suddenly it slipped from her grasp rapping the mare smartly upon the flank as it fell to the ground. Sensitive as a hare, unused to punishment of any sort, the horse started forward as though shot from a catapult.

There was but one uncertain moment as Alina regained her seat, then began a battle royal between mare and rider which did not end until three miles of road had been covered and she found herself within the cool shade of the pine woods of Blossville.

She wheeled the mare about and gazed long and intently down the road. She could neither see nor hear Ben.

A fagot gatherer at work near by, gave a quick glance over her shoulder and noiselessly disappeared into the depths of the wood.

Alina patted the mare's neck. "We must cool off while we wait for Ben. Ah—just the thing!" She espied a young pine and sliding down to the ground led the mare over the needle strewn turf, unbuckling the snaffle rein as she went.

"There! I will give you just a foot of halter. That is all you can have. You don't deserve more after running away."

She laughed softly as she tied the strap firmly about the tree and throwing an arm about the warm foam-

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flecked neck, laid her cheek against the mare's for a moment.

"No girlie; you didn't scare me one bit! No; not one little bit!" She reached down, pulled a bunch of tender grass and thrust it between the puckered lips. "There; take that!" Then she threw herself down at the foot of a huge pine and fell to fanning herself with her sailor hat.

Only a few yards away the fagot gatherer lay clutching the sod, her face contorted by hate and jealousy. "She is waiting for him—him—*him!* Ah—*Mon Dieu que je souffre!* No! No! he is not for her! He shall not be!" The great brown eyes burned with an insane fire. A sun-browned hand reached forth to clutch a short handled wood chopper's axe lying half buried in the dry leaves.

"Liar! Strumpet! Hypocrite! They call me these, and what are you?" Like some reptile intent upon its victim she squirmed and crept noiselessly ever nearer and nearer, from shrub to shrub, from tree to tree, her eyes fixed intently on her goal, the labor stained fingers twitching upon the axe handle.

The brown head with its glint of gold rested against the foot of the great pine. The calm, fearless eyes looked expectantly down the road.

"Him! Him! Ah *Dieu!—Dieu!* she waits for him!" Lili crouched and listened, her body heaving with pent up passion. No; not a sound. There was still time. She reached the last tree and was on her feet, the right arm thrown back, the knuckles of the hand a livid white so fiercely did she clutch the axe handle. Then

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she started forward only to hurry back for she heard the sound of hoof-beats rounding the curve just below. She heard a ringing laugh, Alina was in the road waving her sailor hat reassuringly to Ben who sprang from his jaded hunter with an anxious face.

A fearful, wondering face peered forth from the tangle of roots and grass. A low moan of relief escaped the dry, parted lips. "Thank God it is not Felix!" Then all weak and unstrung she crept back, tree by tree, bush by bush, until she reached a bed of velvety green moss where the ferns grew rank.

She heard them talking in the strange tongue that she hated now except when spoken by one—one only. She knew when they mounted and rode away. As the hoof-beats grew fainter and fainter and were finally lost in the distance she buried her fevered face in the wet, green moss and sobbed hysterically.

Chapter XXIII

“**I**N the name of The Blessed Virgin help a poor soldier of France!” A strange, misshapen thing started up almost from under their horses’ feet. There was a snort and clatter of hoofs.

“Careful, Alina! There’s a ditch down there!” Ben reached for the bit of Alina’s horse. The beast was plunging madly through some brush bordering the roadside.

“Fool! What right have you to frighten the lady’s horse if you are trimmed up to suit a Prussian?” Ben dismounted to tighten Alina’s saddle girth. The one-legged, one-armed veteran of Sedan muttered a curse and scuffled away upon his one short crutch while the horses pointed their ears and arched their necks at the uncouth object.

“They get thicker and thicker. They are a beastly nuisance.” Ben was rolling a cigarette with his bridle slung over his arm.

“I am willing to wager that this fellow is the two hundred and forty-seventh maimed beggar that we have met this side of Rouen. My small change is all gone.”

“Poor things!” said Alina. “What else can they do?”

“That may be,” replied Ben, “I suppose I am a brute, but I loathe a professional beggar as I do a snake. They make me shiver!”

“Why my dear boy! You forget! We are on a pil-



“On the brow of a hill overlooking Rouen they broke their journey.”

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grimage!" Alina's eyes were laughing. "There never was a pilgrimage without hordes of beggars. They are a part of the thing you know."

"To be sure!" muttered Ben seriously, as he began searching his pockets for stray coins. "Ah; here is a *sou*. *Holà! Dit donc!* He whistled to the beggar. As he came tumbling towards them kicking up a cloud of dust, they heard the sound of jingling bells and rattling cart wheels. A farm lantern shot long rays of warm light through the dusty twilight. Suddenly the bells jangled roughly, the farm horse was pulled up on his haunches. "Whoa! Whoa! What in the—devil is that?" Felix's pale face peered over the lantern while Mère Fouchet, with bonnet awry clung anxiously to the cart seat.

"All right!" cried Ben, "only another beggar—a soldier of France this time. Not a Bayard though, he all but landed Alina in the ditch. The mare is good for another forty miles."

"We shall never get there at this rate," said Felix climbing down to hook up a fallen trace. "I bowled over a blind beggar in the last village. It took fifteen minutes and all the cash I had left to get away. If it hadn't been for Mère Fouchet I never should have escaped. She gave them Jesse when they tried to lock me up. She said I was an English clergyman doing the pilgrimage. You should have seen them melt away. Lucky I had on my black hat and coat wasn't it?" He looked up with a comical smile and they all burst into a round of laughter.

"Little mother we could never have come without you."

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Alina coaxed the restless mare up to the cart's side and patted the weather stained hand that clutched the rail.

"No; that we couldn't," cried Felix as he climbed up to his seat. "She is a trump!"

"Let me see where we are now," said Ben unfolding a pocket map, and scanning it by the light of the farm lantern. "Yes; I thought so! That last village was La Roquette. We are almost there. The mare knows it too. Just look at her; isn't she a beauty?"

"She simply won't wait another moment," laughed Alina who guided her mount with a firm hand as she curveted back and forth across the road.

"All right! Let her go Alina!" cried Ben as he vaulted into the saddle. "But keep a short rein through these woods and look out for beggars and pilgrims."

With a chirrup Felix urged the farm horse into a trot and once more the little caravan was in motion.

So it had come about that the Count's original plan was carried out. Felix drove the blue-painted, two-wheeled farm cart with Mère Fouchet in a freshly starched cap perched up beside him, while Alina and Ben galloped, trotted or walked their horses as the speed of the farm nag dictated.

Mère Fouchet had a cousin living at Canteleu on the brow of the hill overlooking Rouen, where they broke their journey. Here the old peasant woman and Alina found comfortable lodging, the men putting up at a small inn close by, where the horses were cared for. They had to walk but a few steps to see the quaint spires, gables and chimneys of the ancient city spread out below, the Seine

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with its wooded islands describing a great curve almost to their feet.

They spent two days exploring "The Imperial City of Normandy." The things that most interested them were the tower, where Jeanne d'Arc was imprisoned and the place of her execution.

One night after a day spent in the old streets and churches of Rouen, Ben and Felix sat smoking in the little paved door-yard of the inn. They listened to the cathedral bell as it struck the hour far below. The habitués of the café had long since sought their homes with uncertain steps.

"Do you believe in reincarnation?" Felix turned suddenly upon Ben.

"I should like to."

"So should I," replied Felix, "for to-day as Alina sat upon her horse in the Place Jeanne d'Arc and you were reciting those lines, she might well have been the reincarnation of the Maid. Her face has that same guileless, fearless enthusiasm; the same indifference to men and things; the same big spirit that made Jeanne d'Arc ride astride a horse in men's clothes."

Felix started to his feet and began pacing back and forth as he talked. "Yes; Alina would have done all these things and more, were it to gain a great, good end."

There was something in his voice that told his love in spite of everything.

Ben flushed consciously as he looked up at the pale, inspired face hanging over him. As torch kindles torch so Felix's love, flashing forth at an unguarded moment,

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awakened another's to full consciousness, so rudely, that Ben's eyes fell as he rose to his feet. The deep organ-like voice had never sounded so tender, so true; there was something pathetic in its rich vibrations as he stood before Felix and laid a hand upon either shoulder with his eyes looking full into those of his friend.

"There never was such a girl. No; not in all Christendom." He put his strong arm about Felix as he had done so often before when his friend was suffering, but now—how strange, he was the sufferer, from an agony of remorse that his love and Felix's should be arrayed against each other because of *her*, the soul, the light, the inseparable of the Inseparables—the beautiful spirit that made their sweet trinity. His voice was husky as he bade Felix a quick "good night," and entered the inn.

* * * * *

All day long they had followed the river. As they left Rouen their way was shrouded in the early morning river mists. High above them on their left they could faintly descry the church of Bon Secours looming spectre like through the fog.

Had it been noontide they would have stopped for lunch at some one of the many little bowered restaurants built so quaintly along the river bank. The tangle of river craft, rich colored cordage and sails enveloped in this mysterious haze caused more than one halt with exclamations of delight. Norman farmers and house-wives on their way to market looked wonderingly at them, as they pushed on through the roughly paved suburbs. When

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at last they reached the open fields the morning sun had dissolved the vapor, bathing everything in its glorious, translucent light.

Ben and Alina were supposed to ride ahead in order to escape the dust of the farm cart but the mare more often cantered along the sod bordering the high road, while Alina would appeal to Felix's judgment upon every feature and incident of the journey, as though it mattered above all else what he thought.

His eyes would glow with the new light which she had so often noticed of late and his voice would have a joyous ring which gladdened her innocent heart. They were still her boys. She loved them with the old impartial love grown stronger through constant comradeship.

And Ben? He was glad that Felix was happy. He would have him happy at any cost. His own secret was locked firmly in the recesses of his great stout breast. Felix must not know it. Alina herself must not know it lest by glance or sigh she disclose it to Felix and his fragile sensitive heart suffer a fresh agony.

And so he would harangue Mère Fouchet in the *patois* of Bréport which he had learned after a fashion, lest she might be lonely with hearing their English all day, or he would join Alina in a brisk canter up a slope which the farm nag would take at a sober walk. Then it was that he had to guard himself against showing the subtle joy that came to him through her every look and gesture as they waited for the others within the shade of a copse or dismounting would sip *grenadine* at a little iron table

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before the door of some rustic *auberge*. Then as the farm cart would come toiling up, something in Felix's face would add a tinge of reproach to Ben's happiness.

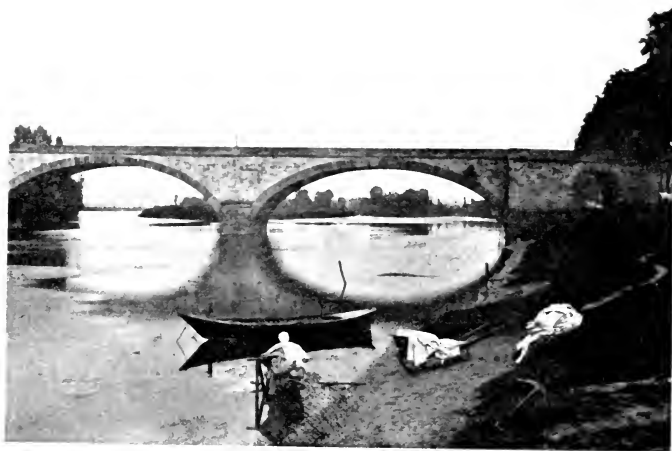
Nothing would do but that Alina should have another *grenadine* with Felix while Ben would adroitly climb up beside Mère Fouchet and drive off. In a few moments he would hear the sharp hoof-beats behind and Felix's joyous ringing laugh mingled with another's that he loved to hear above all else in the world, and Felix none the worse for the short canter.

As they followed the river bank they looked in vain for the colossal perspectives into which the great Turner had woven these quiet meadows, these slowly gliding streams and graceful bridges.

They came upon an *auberge* in the suburbs of Pont de l'Arche which looked to be a good lunching place. The landlord stood bowing and smiling in the doorway, so they gave up their beasts to a farm lad and entered the little low-ceilinged dining room with the inevitable sanded floor.

They lunched off of a roast chicken done to a turn in an old fashioned tin oven. The spit was turned by a tously headed, goggle eyed urchin in a faded blouse and spiked shoes who watched their every movement from his station in the courtyard just outside the *salle à manger*.

"Ah; so you are Americans," said the landlord as he bustled about helping a damson cheeked peasant girl to lay the cloth. "I have seen your compatriots at the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* in Paris." He waved his hand towards a highly colored poster which adorned the wall.



Pont de l'Arche.

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They all turned to look. Alina laughed spasmodically. So did Ben and Felix. They saw a group of American Indians in all their hideous war paint and squatty ugliness.

"So they are not your compatriots?" The landlord looked a trifle disappointed.

"Yes—See!" Ben bared his bronzed forearm, "I was once a 'red-skin' myself." The landlord studied the arm incredulously for a moment; then his eyes encountered Alina's and a broad smile overspread his face. The goggle eyed boy had stolen in. He was peering up at Ben from under his master's arm. Suddenly there was a crash. "*Fool! Stupid!* Would you burn the Americans' dinner to cinders?" The landlord overturned a chair as he rushed into the court and fell to turning the spit madly. Then he beckoned the boy back to his work with scowls and imprecations.

And so they had journeyed through the August day always following the ever winding river. Now that night was coming on, the road lay below the great chalk cliffs which wind and rain had worn into gigantic phantasies towering above them weird and fantastic in the gathering gloom. Away to their right they could see the slowly moving lights of the river craft.

There was every evidence that they were nearing the shrine of their pilgrimage. The air was filled with the sound of mysterious voices coming from anywhere, everywhere, even from beneath their very feet as in the case of the 'Soldier of France.'

They passed sad little companies bearing their sick

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upon litters. They overtook an old peasant trundling a push cart from which there came a sound that made Alina cry out in pity.

Hideous forms hobbled through the dust upon crutches, canes—even upon their hands and knees. Soon they encountered camps by the roadside of those who could ill afford lodgings in the town. They saw a company of acrobats performing upon a green-sward beneath the glare of flaring torches

How he had arrived there so quickly Alina could not fathom. He must have known some short by-path, but there was the Soldier of France leering upwards at a bloused peasant who scowled down at him.

As he heard their horses' hoofs, the Soldier of France cursed and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. The peasant turned full upon them with a brutish gesture.

"Take care Alina!" cried Felix, "You are crowding too near; she will bolt if you aren't careful."

She rode between Felix and the traveling show. She had guided the mare close to the cart; so close that he laid a warning hand upon her arm. Her lips were set in a firm line; her face looked strangely white in the dusky light. "See!" she exclaimed, "How wild the torchlights make the cliffs." She pointed upwards and away from the lights to the towering mass above them, and Felix never saw Potin and his party.

Ben saw them all. Père Boudin pulling his donkey within the circle of light; the peasant girl with the great lustrous eyes burning fiercely; Potin himself scowling at them from beneath the vizor of a new cap, his new

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starched blouse sticking out in stiff ugly lines as he thrust his hands down into his trousers pockets.

"Yes;" replied Felix, "they are uncanny in this light. They are like Druid temples, monstrous idols, or fortresses. Look! See that big one looming out of the mist to the right. It must be—it *is* a fortress!"

"Mont Carmel!" murmured Ben. The happy ring had gone out of his voice. "Only think! Richard the Lion Hearted built it seven hundred years ago."

Felix drove on in silence, under the spell of the centuries, the great crumbling donjon looming higher and higher as they drew near.

Something worse than the centuries had cast a spell upon Ben. "Why had this cursed Potin come to the Pool? And worst of all why had he brought his unfortunate daughter? Must Alina be mortified and Felix tortured by having his past constantly hawked before them? No! it must be stopped at any cost. He and Felix must leave Bréport; the sooner the better.

They passed more gypsy vans, merry-go-rounds and catch-pennies of all sorts ranged along the roadside. It required not a little skill on Alina's part to guide the mare through the confusion of peasants, beggars, toddling babies and helpless pilgrims.

As they reached a turning where a slender church spire came upwards from the gloom, two figures started forth from the roadside, the one leading the other. There was a joyful cry "O Monsieur Felix! Then you have come! Little Marie and I have waited here since dark."

Celeste's pure oval face looked up to them lighted with

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a joyful, satisfied smile. There was an unusual elation in her manner, a great gladness in her voice which touched them all strangely.

"Come! Get in! I will take you to the town!" Felix tossed the reins to Mère Fouchet and held out his arms.

"No! No! we are here in Little Merville with the Abbé Jacquet! The Great Merville is half a kilometer further on." She pointed up the valley—"The healing pool is there." She breathed out the last sentence as though it had been a prayer and crossed herself. Then she heaved a rapturous sigh—"Ah Monsieur Felix; I am *so* glad you have come—and you Monsieur Cushing—and little Marie will be the gladdest one of all to-morrow—to-morrow—Ah; the *bon Dieu* is good."

"Yes; to-morrow—to-morrow!" repeated little Marie, a beautiful smile wreathing her parted lips, the sightless eyes rolled upwards.

"*Enfin—à demain!*" Celeste drew Marie aside as Felix gathered up his reins.

"*Bonsoir Mademoiselle; messieurs!*" There was a deep tenderness in Felix's voice as he called out his "*Bonsoir.*"

"That child's faith staggers me, I never saw anything like it before. Do you suppose anything will happen to-morrow?" He turned to Mère Fouchet.

"Ah Monsieur! Who knows? The *bon Dieu* is good. He healed her, why not the little one?"

Then you think that Celeste was really healed?"

"*Monsieur!*" Mère Fouchet faced him reproachfully.



*"They passed more gipsy vans, merry-go-rounds and
catch-pennies—."*



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"Think it? No Monsieur, I *know* it. Every child of God who was at the Pool that year knows it, for they saw. Seeing is believing. Ah; the *bon Dieu* is good."

Could seeing, make him, a victim of inexorable fate believe? Felix flicked the jaded farm horse with his whip and wondered.

Chapter XXIV

THE triumph of the spiritual over the material; of mind over the fleeting thing that man calls matter; the cure of the blind girl of Sotteville through the medium of a gushing spring and the priestly offices of an historic church, was upon the lips of all.

It was discussed upon the street corners, in the cafés, in the camps by the roadside.

There was many a doubting shrug, many an incredulous laugh, but always some serious, awe-struck face would push itself to the front with—"It is so for I saw!" and the scoffer's laugh would choke in his throat.

The "Great Stag" was the only large inn of Grand Merville. Its quaintly carved timbers had been hewn in the days of Francis I.

With the traditional love that Frenchmen have for such things, the landlord had gathered in from old châteaux, manors and *chaumières*; tapestries, carvings, faience, and metal work of the period in which the inn had been built, so that pilgrims of Canterbury or Palestine never slept or dined in quainter halls.

A remarkable company sat about the table. The Tabard itself never sheltered a more mixed assemblage. All had come to Grand Merville with one intent—to witness a miracle if such a thing were possible; so while they wallowed in the sensuous pleasures of entremets and roast duck they analyzed, each in his own way, the thing that had transpired under their eyes that day.

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There was Biza the great novelist with his cynical smile, who had come all the way from Paris to study and satirize the superstitions of the Church of Rome. Villequier the Parisian nerve specialist with a profile like the great Corsican's who had lately been bold enough to essay cures by hypnotism. Cardinal Ravenna of Rome with the drawn, intent face of the ascetic who would give his life if needs be to substantiate the fact that the cure could never have been accomplished except through the relics and offices of the Church of Rome. He dined with his secretary at a small table somewhat removed from the glare of the hanging lamps.

Side by side before the great carved chimney-piece sat the Swami Savitarka and the Comte de Baigneur. They had pushed away their plates and were talking in low tones, the Count making rapid notes from time to time in a small pocket diary.

Opposite the Swami sat Canon Milenforce of London who had brought down the ire of the Episcopacy upon his head by saying that the Christian Scientists knew more of true Christianity than any sect living. He was traveling through northern France in search of the Gothic and had stumbled upon the pilgrimage quite by accident.

Next him sat Felix and next Felix, Alina, then Ben and further along on the same side the *Maitre* and Miss Dolchester. She had persisted in accompanying him, why he could not fathom. Her irreverent presence had been a constant source of annoyance during the day for he was a devout Catholic and revered his church.

Alina and Ben were talking over the day's happenings

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in low tones. Felix sat strangely silent gazing into his plate. He was thinking it all over. The little shrine set into the end wall of an old stone building; the little statue of St. Mathilde who had given the spring its wonderful healing power; the smoking, flickering tapers; the semi-circular pool below with stone steps descending into its cool depths.

Then that eager, expectant line of sufferers—God—it made his heart ache even now to recall it. Their moans; their muttered prayers as they craned their necks to see the little shrine. The tears had stood in his eyes as, when the sprinkling or bathing had ceased, they would wait expectantly, then totter off with bent heads to take up life's torture again muttering "Not yet—not yet! My faith sufficeth not."

Then when the sad line was all but spent and doubt and disappointment was pictured upon the faces of the watchers, two slight girlish forms the one leading the other, glided into the little enclosure. Their faces were raised heavenwards. The eyes of one mirrored and answered the drifting clouds. The other's, set in a face of celestial purity, gazed with a painful fixedness broken only by the restless quivering of darkly fringed lids.

The murmuring of the crowd was hushed. The groans of the waiting ceased. Only the voice of the priest could be heard. Then a glad, joyous cry startled all. Like magic it was taken up and carried on by the crowd. "A miracle! A miracle! The blind girl of Sotteville is no longer blind! She sees! She sees!"

During all the months of his intercourse with little



*“— The little shrine set into the end wall of an
old stone building.”*



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Celeste, her gentle pleadings, her constant talk of things spiritual had been as the babbling of a brook, a tuneful accompaniment that helped him to infuse a minor strain of religious pathos into his "Virgin of Wisdom."

Now he realized that she had uttered truths. Like those in the cafés, at the street corners, in the humblest camps by the roadside, he had seen and knew.

He looked up from his plate and heard a voice speaking in cold, calculating tones. "A most wonderful case; an evident stimulation of the optic nerve through some subtle hypnotic power exercised by the priest." Villequier turned to Biza who looked up over his gold bowed spectacles with a doubtful smile. "So you are convinced that the child was blind in the beginning? Our opposite neighbor says no; she comes from Bréport where the child often visits." Biza waved his hand with a quick, nervous gesture towards Miss Dolchester, who met his glance with a cold derisive smile.

"Blind!" she laughed quietly. "I have seen her run as hard and chase her mates as well as the best of them. She was no more blind than I. Messieurs; the priests are hoodwinking you, they——"

"It is a lie! I have seen the child daily for weeks. I have painted her, walked with her, talked with her, I know of what I am speaking." Felix started forward with indignant eyes; he had given Miss Dolchester the lie as instinctively as he would have parried a poignard thrust or struck at a vampire. The very sound of her hateful voice had goaded him on to it. As his fierce, quick words rose above the hum of voices, there was a

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lull in the conversation. All eyes were fixed upon Felix who greeted Biza's shrug with one which outdid the great Frenchman's. Felix had not lived in the Quarter for nothing.

As for Miss Dolchester, her face paled with unsubdued treacherous hate. There was a slight commotion at the other end of the table. The Comte de Baigneur was on his feet, fumbling in his breast pocket. "Pardon; Monsieur Biza!" he uttered, as with a courteous bow he drew forth a paper and unfolded it. "As president of the Society for the Investigation of Phenomena, I should like to say that the young man is quite right. The girl was blind. I here hold the signed statement of two reputable doctors of Bréport to the effect that Little Marie was blind—totally blind. This is a precaution which is quite necessary in the investigation of phenomena. As for the exact cause of this wonderful cure, that is for us all to discover." He tossed the document to Felix with a smile, who in turn handed it to the novelist.

"Ah to be sure;" Biza gave the paper a cursory glance while he tugged at his wiry beard. "But there are cases known where blindness comes at given periods and——" He started at sound of the rough grating of a chair upon the sanded tiles.

"Monsieur! Pardon if I interrupt." The Swami was on his feet, his noble swarthy head and ruddy robe strongly relieved by the black recess of the massive chimney-piece towering above him.

"There has been a cure, that we know. Why quibble over doubts and useless precedents. Have we not seen

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little Marie delving into the depths of a rose with wonder and delight? Have we not seen her gazing from the heights of Mont Carmel yonder, marking the course of a boat upon the winding river? Did she not point out the flight of a bird in the blue of infinity? Why then, friends, can we not lay aside all doubts and acknowledge truth when it stares us in the face?

“Here we are people of all climes, all races, all faiths; and why here? Because in spite of sects and creeds we are children of one God. Because we long to prove beyond all doubt the conviction ever born in man, that he lives, grows, is healed of his infirmities by the Spirit of God within him; not by drugs, inoculations, or hypnotism.

“We are immortal souls. These bodies of ours are our servants. He who becomes the servant of his body becomes sick, halt, blind; he is hopelessly lost.

“The Nazarene has truly said that unless we throw over our doubts and fears and become as little children we cannot be saved—from what? Our bodies! The rule of the flesh which is Hell itself.

“Ah; my friends, it is when a gentle child of God like little Marie knows herself to be a *living soul*, not body, and reaching ever upwards comes into at-one-ment with God, that such cures take place.

“I am not pleading for the Church of Rome. I am not pleading for any church, sect or creed, but for Him who is the Life of the Hindus, the Hope of the Zoroastrians, the Salvation of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the God of the Christians.

“Why need we drag in our drugs, our clinics. our

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materia medica, when the thing stands proven before us, as it has been proven thousands of times before. Pardon me for interrupting, Monsieur Biza." He swept his hand gracefully in the direction of the novelist and let it fall upon the Count's shoulder.

Biza waved a polite "not at all," as he reached for a match, lighted a cigarette and began talking with Villequier in quick caustic sentences.

The Cardinal's face was a study of conflicting emotions. It had lighted with inspiration as the Swami's powerful utterances, verifying the miracle, swept on in all their richness until—ah well; one could hardly expect a priest of the Holy City to placidly accept the Zoroastrian's God without a murmur. So the corners of his mouth fell, and the look of the ascetic again came into his eyes as he gave a sleek clerical shrug. No; the cure had been Rome's and Rome's alone.

Felix followed Ben and Alina out into the moonlit courtyard. The Swami's words still rang in his ears. He did not even remark the look of vindictive hate in Miss Dolchester's face as he unconsciously brushed past her in leaving the table.

Chapter XXV

“SO you are *Monsieur le Maître*? I should have known it instantly had Monsieur spoken. I know your voice so well. Monsieur looks as I thought he would, for does Monsieur remember how he once took me in his arms and let me touch his face and silken hair? But I was a little girl then.” Marie’s curling lashes fell. For the first time in her life the pink blush of consciousness colored her cheeks.

She turned to Alina, her clear blue eyes beaming with undisguised admiration. “I had thought you beautiful Mademoiselle! People had told me you were, but—Ah! Mademoiselle—how can I tell you how beautiful you seem to me? Everything is so beautiful!” She buried her face in Alina’s lap and sobbed for joy.

It was the morning following the miracle. The *Maître*, Alina, Ben, and Felix had strolled down the shady, leafy walk which led from Grand Merville to the foot of Mont Carmel.

Riverwards the great white cliff, capped with its pile of mediæval masonry towered perpendicularly to a dizzy height, but from this side the rise was more gradual, although steep enough to make the *Maître* wish himself fifteen years younger.

Here was a huge moat which in the times of the Lion-Hearted, had been crossed by means of a massive draw-bridge.

Half way up Mont Carmel in a secluded corner of the

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old battlements they had found Celeste and Marie gathering wild flowers. As they came upon them Marie held a bunch in one hand while with the other she pointed out flower after flower.

"And that is yellow, and that blue, and that purple? Ah Celeste; I have so much to learn! But they are beautiful—O so beautiful! O I am so happy! Why are not all who can see happy?"

"Ah yes; why?" echoed Felix as he looked down into the face glowing with love and light. "Because we cannot get away from ourselves!"

He had slept but little the night before, but his wakefulness was of a kind that refreshed him more than the sleep of weeks.

Over and over again he had seen the wonderful revelation at the little shrine and had heard the Swami's inspired words. The old fear that had followed him through life was for the time forgotten.

Alina had thrown herself down upon a mound of dry lichens over against the wall. Through a great hole in the masonry she could see down over the slender spire of Petit Merville to the river, winding its way through velvety meadows until it became a slender blue ribbon in a tapestry-tinted landscape.

Ben was stretched at full length upon the ground, gazing up at the sky with thoughtful eyes.

Alina turned her attention to a tiny sail boat beating up against wind and current, then something moving in and out among the ruins attracted her attention. At first she couldn't believe it to be a man, but as he squirmed and

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struggled into the open she recognized the Soldier of France.

He stopped, and turning on his one short crutch beckoned to some one below. In a few seconds the bullet-like head and hulking shoulders of a peasant appeared.

Alina's lips closed firmly as she recognized Potin. He and the beggar soon became lost in the ruins, and she turned her attention to Marie and Celeste, who were singing some little Norman rhymes with an odd minor refrain.

Suddenly Felix sprang up exclaiming—"I must take that view from the top! No; no; don't stir! It is cool and comfortable here. I will be back shortly." He seized his camera and started up the slope.

Alina could see him from her vantage ground as he slowly picked his way upwards through the heaps of stones and rank growing weeds, stopping now and then to photograph choice bits as they caught his fancy. At last he reached the top and seated himself upon a rock. She knew he was giddy from his long climb and would have to steady himself before he neared the edge. Finally he stood silhouetted against the sky, with only one short step between him and eternity.

The girls were still singing the little songs of the peasantry, the piping of their bird-like voices the only sound that broke the quiet of August noontide.

The *Maître* sat upon the ground near Celeste, carving a bit of root into fantastic shapes with his pocket knife. Ben's hat was drawn over his eyes. Alina cast a longing glance after Felix. Had it not been so hot she would have gone up with him. She would go part way to meet

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him, so quietly creeping through the opening, she started up the hill.

It was hot in spite of the wind which whistled through the battlements. Picking her way upwards through the *débris* and weeds she reached a small clump of gnarled oaks. Her eyes traversed the whole horizon, ending with the black spot which Felix's body made against the sky. Then she started and gazed long and curiously at a second black spot—a man lower down on the battlements.

He disappeared, but soon came into sight again, creeping along behind the great masses of masonry as a field mouse creeps from cover to cover. As he came out into an open space he turned, and pulling off his peasant's cap, wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

Alina uttered an exclamation—it was Potin. A wild, breathless fear seized her. There was no mistaking Potin's diabolical intent. He had sworn to kill Felix—he would find him alone!

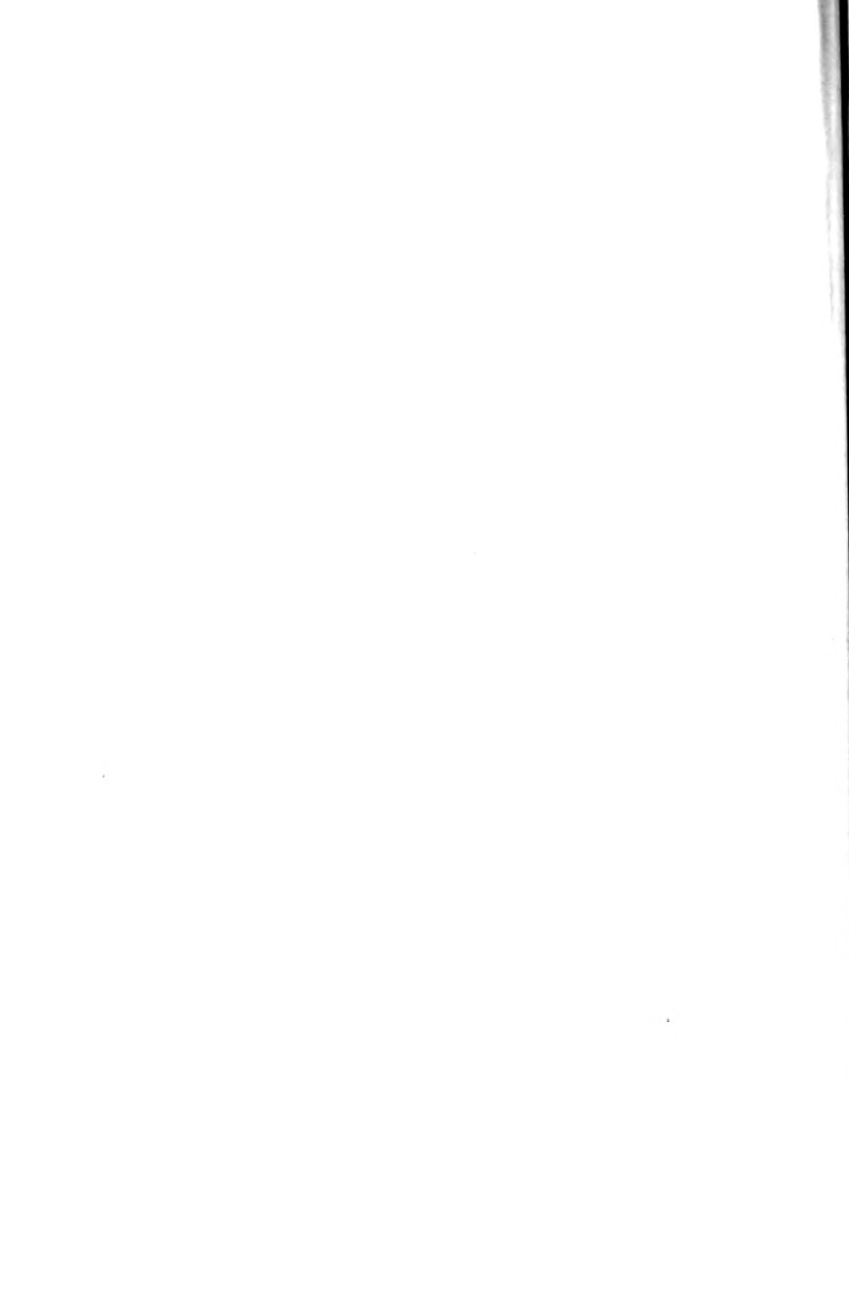
She turned and shouted time and time again to those below, but the wind was against her, there was no response.

There was but one alternative and she seized it instantly. Casting aside her broad leghorn she gathered up her skirts and ran like a deer, over rolling stones, up sliding sand banks, catching fiercely at rocks, dwarf pines, anything by which she could drag herself upwards.

Her breath was soon spent, but on she struggled with a pain in her side that was but a shadow of the one clutching at her throat—the fear lest she might not get there in time to save him.



“—Richard the Lion Hearted built it seven hundred years ago.”



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She fell in a bed of briars and rose with bleeding hands. She was almost there. She tried to warn him——“Felix! Felix!” but her cry was barely a hoarse whisper. The south wind racing through the jagged openings drove dust down her dry throat and he never heard. Again she stumbled and fell.

Felix sat upon the very edge. The people on the white road far below looked like black beetles. The noisy merry-go-rounds and gypsy vans resembled a toy village. It was deliciously restful up there. All sounds were far away excepting the rushing of the hot wind through the battlements. A long string of canal boats wound slowly round a curve in the placid, sluggish river. A flock of pigeons circled about below him.

Felix was happy. The Virginia doctor's death sentence had been swept from his consciousness by the mighty truths revealed to him during the past twenty-four hours.

He sat for a long time gazing downwards. Suddenly the chasm below became for some unaccountable reason, an awful thing from which he shrank. He caught at the tufts of grass upon either side and looked over his shoulder.

Right upon the ledge beside him was Potin, who muttered a savage curse as he balanced his heavy weight for the lunge which would send his victim over the edge. He wavered in his purpose. Something had confused him——a woman's cry. A piece of crumbling stone gave way beneath his heel, making him lose his balance. Vainly he swung his awkward arms trying to steady

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himself. Then there was a horrible shriek and the clumsy body went hurtling downwards.

Felix closed his eyes and threw himself backwards, the old terrible death clutch at his heart. He was half-conscious of a pair of arms dragging him backwards. He tried to regain his feet, but the arms held him down and a deathlike weight fell across his chest—he fainted.

There were quick cries of horror from below, increasing in volume like the droning of some great bee-hive, then silence once more reigned supreme.

The flock of doves flew up from below, and settling down upon the weatherworn battlements, craned and twisted their sleek necks, eyeing the two silent figures suspiciously. The south wind soughed through the loop holes. The rent, blood-stained sleeve of Alina's gown fluttered in the wind. The doves rose in a mass and flew away.

One bare arm encircled his body. The other was about his neck, the tapering fingers lost in his flaxen hair. His silent face looked upwards. Her cheek was pillowed upon his breast.

The dry grass rustled. Again the doves came, this time more boldly, only to circle away at sound of foot-steps, firm and quick.

Ben awoke from his siesta with a vague sense of unrest. He heard the cries of the crowd below. A boy who had outdistanced his mates came running up wild-eyed, breathless, with the grewsome news.

"Felix! Alina! Where were they?"

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He hesitated not an instant, but hurried upwards, bending all his strength to the task.

"O God!" Ben's ruddy face became ashen as he saw the two silent forms. Only the God to whom he had appealed knew the pain, the suffering, the love, the compassion in that one short cry.

He untwined her arms, gently disentangled the torn and bleeding fingers from the flaxen locks, and bore her to a bed of dry grass near by. As he started to put her down, a great inward sob convulsed his frame. The dear, beautiful head rested in the hollow of his shoulder. He hesitated an instant only, but in that one short instant his resolves went to the winds.

He strained the passive form to his breast and kissed the cold lips time and time again. Then he tore off his coat and put it gently beneath her head.

There was a guilty look in his eyes as he bore Felix to a safe place muttering. "I am a brute! She is his—wholly his!"

Penitent, with remorse and self-condemnation written upon his sturdy face, he lifted it heavenwards and vowed to renounce his love.

Chapter XXVI

“**N**O; Potin is still alive! He may live for weeks!”

They were waiting before the door of a thatched cottage at the foot of Mont Carmel where Ben had carried Alina. The *Maitre* and Mère Fouchet were with her.

“Bah! I feel so weak.” Felix rose to his feet and threw back his shoulders with an impatient gesture, “but it was all so sudden—so terrible that I—I—went all to pieces.”

In the silence which followed, Ben started to his feet and paced the little dooryard anxiously. He heard the sound of many voices drawing nearer and nearer. Felix looked at him questioningly. The voices became more and more distinct.

“Curse them! I knew they would do it!” Ben halted and looked down the lane.

“What? Do they think I tried to kill him?” Felix sprang up with horror struck eyes.

“Yes; they do! Pull yourself together old man or it will go badly with you.”

Up the lane rode two *gendarmes*, their gorgeous trappings shining in the sunlight, sitting in their saddles with an insolence born of imposing uniforms and the craven fear of the peasantry.

They turned now and then to warn back the hooting mob that crowded against their horses' heels. Something

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scuffled and squirmed along before them, sending up clouds of dust. It was the Soldier of France, the perspiration rolling down his dust-caked face in little gutters, as he turned from time to time and pointed ahead.

At last he made a pirouette on his short crutch and pointing his index at Felix waited for the *gendarmes*. "There he is! Yes—he of the yellow hair. I saw him do it."

As he uttered the words a great shout went up from the crowd. There were imprecations, curses. "Dirty Americans! Murderers! *Cochons!*"

An old hag rushed forward and spat at Ben, but he never noticed it, his eyes were fixed upon the Soldier of France with a look of such withering disgust, that the beggar's arm fell and he slunk away into the crowd.

As the *gendarmes* delivered their orders in short, quick sentences, Ben lifted his hat with courtly grace (he always knew when it paid to be polite) "Messieurs; we will gladly accompany you."

Felix started forward with an angry denial upon his lips, resistance expressed in every movement and feature.

"Stop! you are mad!" Ben caught his arm. "These fellows are acting under orders. Don't make a scene here. We must see their commanding officer. *Messieurs à votre service!*" Again he lifted his hat and they fell in between the two horsemen whose bared sabers flashed in the sunlight as they beat back the hooting crowd.

There was a moment's delay as Ben hesitated and started back towards the cottage. "Alina—what had

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she seen? Her testimony would be invaluable. He halted dejectedly, as Mère Fouchet appeared in the doorway and shook her head. Alina was recovering from the shock; she would be too weak to go with them. With grim face he fell doggedly into line once more.

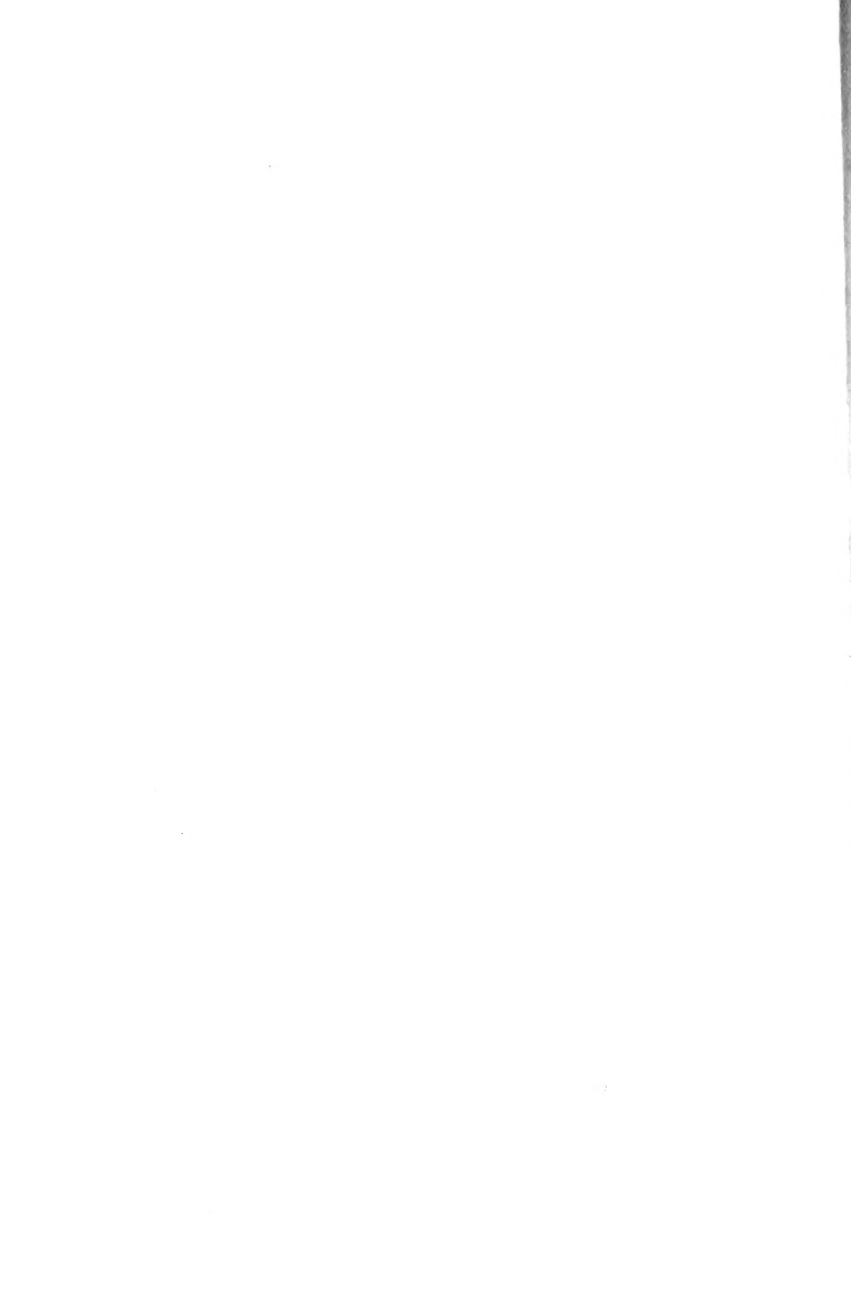
Down the shaded lane, out into the paved highway they went. At the windows and doorways curious excited faces peered forth. The news of the tragedy of Mont Carmel had traveled with lightning rapidity.

"A bas les Américains! Down with the American hogs!" The din of the clattering mob echoed between the narrow streets. The object of their hatred could be easily seen for he walked head and shoulders above the others, meeting the insulting epithets hurled from doorway and balcony with unflinching eyes. The weakness of a few moments ago was gone. He knew now that the tragedy of Mont Carmel might mean life or death for him.

They passed the Great Stag Inn. Biza and Villequier looked down at them from an open window, surprise and wonderment upon their faces. The procession turned into a side street, so narrow that the crowd was forced up against the walls and into the open doors of houses and shops. Always under foot, kicked and pushed by the throng, the Soldier of France suddenly found himself imprisoned in the small archway of a covered passage debouching from a distant court-yard. He was vainly prodding the solid mass of humanity with his crutch when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a pair of cold, cruel eyes met his own. With suppressed



Court-yard of the Great Stag Inn.



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excitement Miss Dolchester dragged him back into the dark recesses of the passageway.

She shook him by the shoulder of his blouse and peered eagerly into his face—"Swear it! do you hear? Swear it! Don't let them frighten you. Swear that you saw him do it. Here—" she thrust five shining *louis* into his hand, "you shall have more!"

The beggar's eyes were staring. He trembled as he counted the pieces over in his dirty palms. "I swear it now and always Mademoiselle!" he tore off his hat with an elfish grin. "I must be off or I shall be too late. They are at the *gendarmerie* by this time." He hobbled down the passage and turned into the street.

Miss Dolchester loitered in the passage until silence reigned in the little street, then she cautiously made her way towards the river. As she approached the Great Stag she passed two of her table companions.

"The English woman is not *spirituelle*," said Villequier as he locked his arm in Biza's.

"*Spirituelle*? Bah! She is as cold and slippery as an eel in a frozen pond, and as cruel as—*Je ne sais pas quoi*—the Lady Macbeth of her Shakespeare. That is how I read her face, and reading faces is my profession—*eh, mon ami?*"

"And mine," laughed Villequier. "I can always tell the color of the pill needed before they show their tongues. Ah; they are already excited over the young American."

The two Parisians approached the *gendarmerie*, a long low building over which floated the French tri-color. An excited, expectant throng filled the square. There were

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cries of "Barboche! Barboche! Where is Barboche?" "Who is Barboche?" Biza accosted a *gendarme* in fatigue uniform, who passed them.

"The legless beggar; the Soldier of France. He is the only witness. There he is!" and the *gendarme* proceeded to cut his way through the crowd, the Soldier of France scuffling along in his wake.

"Shall we go in?" asked Biza, "these affairs furnish rare material. I know the commanding officer. I will send in my card."

Villequier shrugged his shoulders. "If you like."

It was a large, cheerless, white-washed room. The commanding officer sat at a desk. Before him stood Felix, a *gendarme* upon either hand. A group of would-be witnesses were grouped about the door. Ben stood a few paces away with folded arms and immobile face.

"You say the American pushed him off?" The commanding officer frowned over his fierce moustache.

One of the *gendarmes* guarding Felix saluted, "He did Monsieur."

"And who saw him do it?"

"Barboche; Soldier of France; beggar on the National highway."

"Bring him in!"

All eyes were turned towards the door as the beggar stumbled over the sill, he shuffled up to the desk, and pulling off his cap ducked his head.

"Barboche; Soldier of France; beggar; you were on Mont Carmel to-day and saw the American push Mon-

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sieur Potin of Blossville, from the fortifications?" The officer leaned forward and peered over his desk at the beggar.

"I swear it sir! I was there. The American quarreled with him. He pushed him—so!" Barboche accompanied his words with a forward movement of arms, his crutch slipped and he fell upon his open palms, while the stick went clattering across the floor.

"Stand up, Barboche!" A titter went round the room. Even the officer smiled at his own command, then he turned upon Felix.

"The case is a serious one. What have you to say Monsieur?"

"Before God the beggar lies!" Felix spoke in fierce suppressed tones. "I never touched Potin! He was awkward, he stumbled and fell. He was about to assassinate me. He is a dangerous character. The Comte de Baigneur of Silleron, Seine Inférieure, who left here this morning would tell you so."

"You are friends of the Comte de Baigneur?" The officer's voice softened perceptibly.

"We are. My friend and I often visit him at his Château.

"Attention!" The officer tapped on his desk with his pencil. There was a sound of shuffling feet at the door, then a voice called out. "Pardon Monsieur! May I speak? I am from Bréport. I know these gentlemen well. I know Monsieur Potin well. He is a good citizen. Monsieur—— (the speaker pointed his thumb at Felix)

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is an enemy of Potin's. He assaulted him twice before. It was on a steamship coming from America. It is true; Potin has told me himself; Potin's wife has told me; Potin's daughter——"

"That will do! That will do!" The officer rapped his knuckles upon the desk. "Who are you?"

"Père Boudin they call me at Bréport. Jean Jacques Boudin; letter carrier, town crier——"

"Enough Boudin!" The officer turned to Felix. "Did you assault Potin as Monsieur Boudin states?"

"I did." There were low murmurings and whispers from the back of the room. The officer rapped. Felix continued, "but with sufficient cause. I was protecting his wife. He was beating her. He is a brute! He——"

"That will do! That will do! *Enfin*, you were angry with him again to-day." The officer looked up suspiciously, then he frowned. "This is a case for the judge. I shall be obliged to imprison you. The testimony of these witnesses is too important to pass over."

"Monsieur!" Ben stepped forward.

"I swear as a gentleman that my friend is beyond reproach. Is the testimony of a gentleman of honor not worth more than that of a beggar in the road, or the gossip of Bréport?" He turned upon the letter carrier, whose eyes rolled aimlessly about while his hand sought his weak, tobacco-stained mouth in an effort to appear at ease.

"*Non Monsieur!* There are no social distinctions in cases of this sort. I am not a judge. My duty is to arrest where the case is suspicious, and this case is undeniably

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so." He put on his *pince-nez* and began to fill out a blank lying upon the desk before him.

Felix looked straight before him, one hand tightly clutching his coat lapel, the other twisting and turning his handkerchief which he had unconsciously rolled into a ball.

Suddenly there was a commotion outside. Those inside moved about restlessly, rising on their toes to look out of the open door.

"If you please make way—let me pass!" Ben turned quickly, so did Felix at sound of the Master's voice, but the commanding officer kept on writing until the clear ringing tones of a woman's voice echoing between the bare walls brought him to his feet.

"Why do you arrest Monsieur? You accuse him falsely! I swear it! I was there! I am the only witness!" Alina grasped the desk rail and stopped to catch her breath with wide indignant eyes, the pallor of her long fainting spell still overspreading her face.

"Permit me to swear to the veracity of this young lady's character. She will tell you only the truth!" The *Maitre* made a profound bow to the commanding officer who looked up with an incredulous smile.

"She the only witness? and what of him? He saw the prisoner push him off." He pointed at the Soldier of France who had slowly edged towards the door.

Alina turned upon the beggar. "*He? He* saw him do it? It is a lie! A lie! He was not there! I swear he was not there!" She raised her bare right arm, from which hung the torn, blood-stained sleeve.

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"Mademoiselle is right! The beggar is a perjurer!" They all started and turned as Biza pushed his way through the crowd. "I was exploring the caverns leading off from the moat of Mont Carmel this morning with my friend. I know the exact moment when Potin fell, for I heard him shriek. At that very moment I came upon this beggar, this traitor of France, hiding his cowardly filthy self behind a pile of stones." Biza shrugged his shoulders and opened his palms. "So how could he have seen Potin fall? My friend you have no case! You must discharge the American! Look!" he laid his hand upon the officer's arm. "You see criminals day by day. You cannot doubt that fact. The only witness is beyond suspicion." He faced about and every eye in the room became fixed upon Alina.

The officer fingered his glasses nervously for a moment, then shrugging his shoulders rose to his feet as he tore up the paper before him, and motioned to the door. "Lieutenant! Set the American free, and see that he comes to no harm."

"Wait!" Biza's voice rang out again clear and commanding. "Do you not count perjurers as criminals here in Grand Merville?"

The officer flushed at the novelist's audacity, but turned towards the door. "Lieutenant! Arrest Barboche!"

The Soldier of France had reached the porch fighting his way with fist and crutch, but the lieutenant dragged him into the middle of the floor, craven and whimpering.

"The beggar was bribed! I will wager a thousand francs!" As Biza uttered the words the lieutenant jerked

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Barboche's hand from his pocket, and five bright gold pieces went jingling along the floor.

"Ah; I thought as much!" exclaimed Biza as he turned to Felix, "You have an enemy!"

Chapter XXVII

THE forge of the village smithy sent a ruddy glow out through the battered doorway into the September twilight. The faces of the peasants standing in a semi-circle about the anvil reddened under the fierce flare of the fire. Their legs threw long spindling shadows across the dooryard.

Blondel the smith, pulled a horseshoe out of the coals, it was at white heat. He struck it with heavy stolid blows which sent small meteoric showers of sparks out to the road.

"Potin is a *bon garçon*." The smith struck the rapidly cooling shoe a few superfluous taps, and thrusting it into the coals turned with one arm akimbo, the other working the bellows handle, to catch the words of the lime-kiln keeper whose chalky hair and inflamed eyelids bespoke his occupation.

"The only *aubergiste* in the department who gives credit! Eh Jean?" the lime-kiln keeper turned to the village cobbler, a pudgy little man with side whiskers.

"*Mon Dieu, quel crédit!* He would wait!"

"Others have to wait too!" broke in the tinsmith, a little man with a sooty face.

The butcher shrugged his fat shoulders. "Who *par exemple?* The *marchand de vin* in Paris! He can afford to wait!"

"*Vous avez raison!* He can wait till doomsday!" The company turned. Père Boudin entered the doorway.

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"Doomsday? Why?"

"Why? Potin is dying! I have just come from Blossville."

"Poor Potin! No more drinks in his *auberge!*" The carpenter rubbed the sleeve of his blouse across his lips.

"Yes; it is *bien triste!*" echoed Boudin in perfunctory tones as he ran over his letters. "How strange! A letter for Mère Fouchet. She never has letters—and here are two for the Americans."

"A letter for the tow head?" cried the butcher, his heavy body convulsed with inward laughter.

"Hist!" The letter carrier laid his finger against his nose and glanced over his shoulder. "He won't be getting them long! Why? Because he will be guillotined!"

"Guillotined?"

Five open mouthed faces with bulging eyes closed up to the letter carrier.

"They say—mind messieurs—I don't say so, but they say that there is new evidence—that if Potin dies——"

The letter carrier finished his sentence in graphic pantomime, laying his head upon the packet of letters in his left hand, he drew the forefinger of his right across his throat with a peculiar gurgling sound.

"Curse the Americans!" the smith struck the bellows handle a blow which made the fire leap up madly, sending a red glare over the six sinister faces.

At sound of footsteps they fell away from the carrier. Their eyes sought the open door. A look of stolid immobility was upon each face as Ben, Alina and Felix crossed the field of light and disappeared in the twilight.

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"Good night *mes amis!* I must deliver these letters." The letter carrier pulled his vizored cap over his eyes and started off for Mère Fouchet's. Two topics had furnished him abundant material for gossip for many weeks. The miraculous cure of the blind girl and the tragedy of Mont Carmel. Potin had been brought home by easy stages, and lay for the most of the time unconscious. When not unconscious the sick man cursed his inoffensive wife, his daughter, the food which they offered him. He cursed the neighbors who, with wheedling voices tried to coax a smile out of him, by telling tales of the "tow-headed American," and of the "whole pig-headed race of Americans."

Boudin knew well Mère Fouchet's antipathy for Potin, and as he approached her cottage a cunning smile twitched his weak mouth into maudlin lines. Mère Fouchet had put a kettle on the fire and seated upon a low bench, bellows in hand, was coaxing the colza stalks into a blaze.

"A letter from your cousin at Canteleu, Mère Fouchet!" Boudin entered the open door and tossed the letter upon the table. "When you answer it tell her that Potin is worse."

He looked over his shoulder at Mère Fouchet as he turned to leave, then he stopped and fidgeted with his packet of letters, "Potin will be dead before she can get it." Again he raised his eyebrows and looked at Mère Fouchet.

The wheezing of the bellows was the only response.



Père Boudin and the Miller.

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She had said "*Merci*," as he tossed the letter upon the table that was all.

"The doctor says he will die within twenty-four hours. They are quite sure now that his neck is broken."

The bellows clattered to the floor; the bench was overturned with a crash. Mère Fouchet stood firmly on her feet with her arms akimbo, her eyes flashing fiercely.

"Thank the *bon Dieu* that his cursed neck is broken! Thank the *bon Dieu* that he can no longer beat his poor wife. Thank the *bon Dieu* that he can no longer rear children to inherit his hellish ways, like the one who used to sleep there!" she pointed at Alina's room.

"I tell you Boudin, he is no kin to me if he did marry my daughter. Go! Go! Fool! Busybody! And come here no more whining about Jacques Potin! Go, I say!"

She pointed at the door, the room vibrating with the detonations of her voice, which had risen to a shriek.

Père Boudin's watery eyes rolled aimlessly for a moment; his hand weakly sought his mouth, out of the corners of which trickled little rivulets of liquid tobacco, then the look of the busybody, the breeder of calumny returned to his leathery wrinkled face. He turned back upon her with an impudent shrug. He feared no woman, least of all an old grandmother like Mère Fouchet.

As he approached he shook his bony hand in her face. "And she who sleeps in yonder bed now? What of her? Is she a whit better than Potin's daughter?"

Before the sound of his voice had died away, Mère Fouchet's strong arms pinioned his own to his sides, there

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was a muttered curse in his ear. He was hurled head-long through the open door. He landed in a bed of briars. The cottage door closed with a bang. All was quiet save Boudin's groans as he rubbed his knees and sought for his spectacles. He picked up his cap and scattered letters and once more started on his rounds, stopping only to shake his fist at Mère Fouchet's door.

As he passed from door to door the peasants marveled at his silence, but a question here or a bit of news there soon restored him to a sense of his own importance.

The children would crowd about him with chunks of bread in their hands, their faces smeared with *confiture*, and listen with wide opened eyes. The parents would turn grave and ask "What of Potin?"

"Potin? Ah yes; poor Potin!" The letter carrier would wag his head dismally. "The doctor says he will surely die."

"And the American?"

Boudin's shoulders would rise. "Ah; who knows what will happen to him, I don't. But listen—they say—" his finger would fall upon the side of his nose, and they would crane their necks and listen.

So from door to door the seed of hatred was sown by a poor weak fool, to whom gossip was as the staff of life.

As he pulled the bell rope at the gate of the walled cottage a smile of satisfaction lighted his face, for one of the letters which he held in his hand had not been properly stamped. There were twenty-five centimes to collect.

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Ben answered his ring, and vainly hunted his pockets for change, then said, "Wait an instant—perhaps Monsieur Felix has it."

As Ben turned away Boudin gazed within the enclosure with greedy eyes. Here was fresh material for gossip. The yard was littered with packing-boxes. "Then the Americans are on the point of leaving?"

Curiosity got the better of discretion. He gradually edged up the walk until he could see through the lighted window. A table was spread, Felix had tilted his chair backwards and was going through his pockets for *sous*, while Ben waited. Alina sat watching him, her elbows resting upon the table, her fingers idly toying a spray of water cress which garnished a fowl just brought in by the old peasant cook.

Ben frowned as he ran against Boudin in the darkness. "Here!" He dropped the money into the carrier's box and pointed at the gate.

Boudin looked up at him with puckered lips and raised eyebrows.

"Has Monsieur heard the news?"

Ben made no reply but frowned blackly. He stood still pointing fixedly at the gate.

"Then Monsieur knows that Potin is dying?"

"Go! I tell you!" Ben gave the letter carrier a shove which sent him spinning down the walk. As he disappeared in the darkness, Ben closed and bolted the gate.

"Potin is dying?" Alina looked up at Ben with troubled eyes as he stood opening his letter. Her glance

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fell to the bright green cresses in her fingers, then traveled anxiously across the table to Felix who sat before the fire. Although it was not cold, he leaned forward with thin transparent hands stretched out to the blaze. His face had steadily grown paler since that day upon Mont Carmel.

The fear which had clutched his heart so mercilessly, blotting out that one rapturous glimpse of a promised land was doing its deadly work.

Ben and Alina had both seen it. They had talked it all over time and time again, viewing the matter from every point. They must get him away. Nothing but a change of scene, a fresh start with new surroundings would do.

Alina must stay, there were *toiles* for her to finish. Had not Schock said that she would be the Rosa Bonheur of her country, could she have but one more year with him?

"The Inseparables" must be separated. Aye; there was the rub. Ben had cast about for anything to look at when talking the matter over with her. The sky, the sea, the gulls, anything but her eyes; he could not look into them.

"I am glad those cases are all packed." Ben turned to Alina with lowered eyes as he calmly folded the letter and thrust it into his pocket. "My father is ill, he has been failing for some time. We must sail day after to-morrow."

Felix looked up with dumb reproach in his eyes, and Ben fell to pacing the floor.

Chapter XXVIII

A HOST of men, women, youths and girls traveled steadily onwards like an army of locusts, leveling the ripe colza plants with knife and sickle, tying them into bunches which were stacked in huge piles.

Another army of men spread great canvas cloths upon the ground, upon which they strewed the plants knee-deep. Big-footed farm horses were then driven over them, threshing out the seed from bursting pods as they pranced and galloped under the lashes of their drivers.

It was the harvesting of the colza. Could the Parisians sitting within the glow of the burning colza oil conjure up more lovely scenes than those of the harvest?

According to the colza harvest went the luck of the people of Bréport and the outlying villages. Along the banks of Bréport's one stream were the colza mills with old-fashioned water wheels, where the oil was extracted from the seed, after it had been steamed and packed into cloth bags.

"The Inseparables" drove between the busy fields for the last time. Felix's eyes lingered upon tantalizing schemes of color which the faded blues, reds and browns of the peasants' costumes presented, always relieved by the blue sky and masses of golden colza.

As the afternoon wore on a figure plodded up from the valley with purposeless tread. At first she stopped from

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time to time to chat with the workers, but the conversations always ended with—"And your father? What of him?" until her face wore the hunted look of a driven beast, and her eyes sought the sod beneath her feet.

She began to avoid the reapers as she had the thankless bedside of the cursing brute at home. It had become intolerable. She could stand no more. She had fled to the fields. Seeking a shady spot beneath a great stack of colza plants, she threw herself down and watched the distant harvesters.

She could hear the hum of their voices, their snatches of song, their rude jesting; then another sound, that of a voice singing made her lean far out upon an arm and peer down the road towards Sotteville.

Yes; she had thought as much, it was Captain Burns. She recognized his swinging sailor gait, the bronzed face, the black merry eyes, the dusky curls under his sailor's *béret*.

The song he sang she also knew. He had sung it so often when she and the other fisher girls had gone on board the *Princess Beatrice*, and had drank the health of the handsome young captain in the sloop's little cabin, so sweet and clean compared with the fish boats of Sotteville. But what wonder when its cargoes were always the clean crisp potatoes of Normandy, which the sloop carried to London during the autumn months. She waited with downcast eyes until his joyous cry told her that he had discovered her; then she looked up at him, something akin to pleasure lighting her face.

Here was a diversion. Here at least her slightest look

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or action would meet with worshipful glances instead of scowls and curses.

The Jerseyman's French was not always easy to understand, but the black, glowing eyes filled the void so ardently that Lili's cheeks which the sick room had paled, flushed pink again and again.

He was so handsome, so intelligent; so unlike these clumsy countrymen about her. He could tell her so much of the outside world. His mind was not bent on crops and cattle and fish alone.

"Listen my little Normandy rose." She could feel his breath upon her cheek. "The *Princess Beatrice* sails tonight on the flood tide. They will never know how or where you went. Don't say no again!" His arm rustled through the dry colza twigs at her back and settled about her waist. The black burning eyes were begging, torturing, tempting. Then of a sudden she drew herself away. Something was running in her head—"If you love me live a pure life."

"*Ah Dieu!*" She gasped as though in pain and passed her hand before her eyes. How hard—how useless it was to struggle. She held him off at arms' length, a hand upon either shoulder, he begging, imploring, enticing with those eyes which must have descended from some son of Capri. She looking with distraught gaze far out over the high road. A two-wheeled farm cart came rattling down the slope. Felix was driving. Beside him sat Alina. They were talking intently, their heads close together. The Jerseyman felt his shoulders within a grip of steel. The face before him became cold

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and hard. The hands relaxed their vice-like hold and flew to her eyes; then she cast herself face down in the colza, panting and heaving with inward passion.

The Jerseyman sprang to his feet with an impatient gesture, his black brows knitted, his eyes burning with jealousy. "You care for another. Good-bye; I am going!"

"No! No! Stay! Listen!" She dragged him down beside her. "I will go! Do you hear? I will go to-night—to-night!"

She uttered the words over and over eagerly, rapidly, as though by the very repetition of her resolve the departure could be hastened.

"But listen!" She struggled to her feet. "My people must not know. Auguste, the beast whom my father would have me marry must not know. Not a living soul must know.

"You cannot take me on at the basin, that will never do. But at ten o'clock row your skiff to the old fisherman's pier. You know; outside towards Bréport. Tie it under the pier—When the *Princess Beatrice* tacks out on the full tide at midnight, I will be off the Smuggler's Gorge waiting for you—I can row—Now go *mon cher!* No—No—Not yet!" The ardent eyes, the strong arms were already claiming their due. She wrested herself away and pointed down the road. "Go! We must not be seen together."

Like a whipped dog sent to his kennel, the sailor took his departure, gloating over, yet only half believing his good fortune.

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Throwing herself down again she waited until his foot-falls were lost in the distance; then taking her way across the plain she descended into the outskirts of Sotteville by a sunken lane.

What use was there in being pure after all? What did it matter to him? Poor, ignorant, untutored Lili. Purity for purity's sake meant nothing to her. Purity for Felix's sake had meant everything, but now—what need was there of being pure, it was so *triste*.

She came up the slope through a copse by the edge of the plain towards Blossenville. She stopped suddenly with parted lips and half-closed eyes. Was it a canary singing so merrily or the piping of a lark mounting higher and higher above her head that made her see a wide sunny balcony also high in air? A blue sky overhead, the lace work of Notre Dame's aged façade over the way, a figure in the shade—that of a woman lying upon a little couch, her head embedded in cushions—the opening of a door—quick footsteps—a joyous cry—the rude warm clasp of yearning arms and—now what?

Galling, tormenting images surged through the poor, unreasoning brain as she plodded on with spiritless steps.

Why now? Why at this moment when goaded to madness by an ungovernable jealousy, should she look through the open gate of a milk farm full upon them sitting there by the door, surrounded by a host of farm fowl, he holding a glass aloft, his face beaming with the old, simple, boyish joy, as he toasted Alina with the pure, fresh milk which the farm wife poured out for them.

They started and turned as the farm dog dashed at the

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gate with barks and much ado. There were footfalls in the lane. The dog returned wagging his tail as they rapidly died away.

The plain was suffocatingly hot. There was that in the air which foretold a coming storm.

Lili plodded on seeing nothing, hearing nothing, only alive to a bitter galling hatred, born of an insane jealousy. What from the heat within her head and that which beat down upon it from without, she was all but swooning, as she once more threw herself down in the cooling moss and ferns of the wood of Blossesville, only to moan and sob and start up again with convulsive movements, tearing up great clods of moss, gazing about with vacant restless eyes.

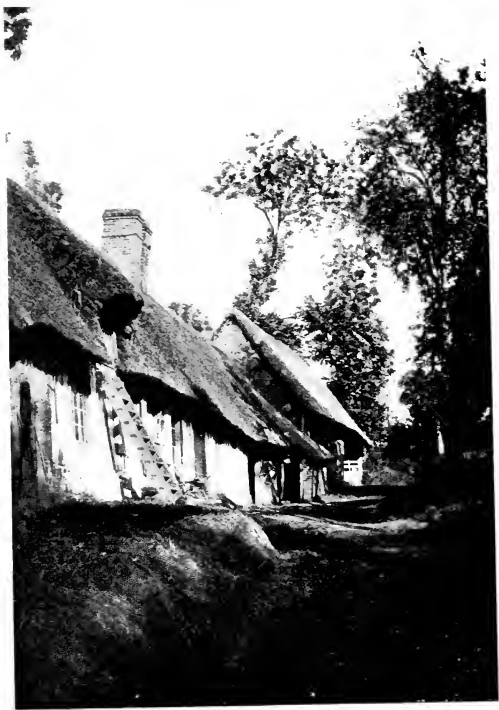
"He shall not! He shall not! He is little Lili's—only little Lili's."

There was something savage, bestial in her cry as she set her firm white teeth into the arm against which her cheek rested, until bright red globules started up from the livid flesh.

A hand seized her by the shoulder, shaking her roughly. "Get up ingrate! Fool! You had much better be weeping for your good father than that yellow-haired American."

"I hate the American!" Lili was upon her feet, her eyes blazing with demoniacal fire. "Do you hear? I could kill the American!"

Miss Dolchester's cold green eyes were fixed full upon the girl before her with diabolical intent. "Your father



"Through the open gate of a milk-farm."

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is dying—the American ought to be guillotined for it—those who saw him do it are afraid to testify—”

“I am not!” There was a wild cunning look in Lili’s eyes. She caught Miss Dolchester by the arm. “The American did it! I saw him push my father off! He did! He did! I swear it!” Her fingers twitched as she held them aloft.

Miss Dolchester smiled and nodded her head towards the *auberge*. “Come! You are needed at home.”

Lili obeyed, but she walked as a somnambulist walks, neither seeing nor caring for what lay in her path.

As the afternoon wore on, groups of women gathered about the *auberge*, standing in the dooryard muttering in low tones.

Later on, men in Sunday blouses knocked idly about in the underbrush kicking aimlessly at rotten stumps, wagging their heads, muttering always in their unmusical *patois*.

Miss Dolchester sat before her easel in the arbor outside, cold, calm, apparently indifferent to all that transpired about her. She worked industriously, as though the last *séance*, with Potin as model, had not been terminated by the approach of the grim visitor. She had painted in the sick room for two weeks, with but one end in view, a picture that would stagger the realists and bring her fame. She wore a satisfied smile. The *toile* was a success. She could already see the crowd about the “Dying Peasant,” as it hung on the line in the Salon. With deft brush work, a clever blending of tones with

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the thumb or palette knife, she put the picture through the "pulling together" process.

Always apparently indifferent to what transpired outside, but ever stopping to peer through the vines as new comers appeared upon the scene, she smiled and plotted and worked.

No—not now; not till the flood tide of their anger reaches its height, as they sit about this very table must the blow be struck.

As nightfall approached the sympathizers were reinforced by those whose trades had detained them during the day.

Père Boudin came driving up in his donkey cart; he had just finished his last round. The blacksmith came looming through the dusk like some big black giant. Then the tinsmith and cobbler came together, both little men who feared the darkness and the death so close at hand.

Auguste, the would-be son-in-law upon whom was to fall the mantle of the *aubergiste*, sat surlily in the café where he dispensed drinks, keeping an eye upon Lili as she passed in and out with listless steps, filling the doctor's orders.

As the night darkened there was less to do; the dying man was unconscious, so Lili climbed to her loft and sat staring into the flickering candle flame, neither seeing nor hearing, dazed into passive indifference by that to which she had set her hand.

She sat there for a long time; how long she never knew; then she sprang to her feet as a cry, a sad wail

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rang out into the woods, echoing through the avenues of pines. It was the cry of the wife who had borne the blows, the cuffs, the curses. It was a cry that told of love and devotion in spite of a life of misery and suffering.

Jacques Potin was dead. A whispering, gossiping crowd filled the café. Black-hooded widows came stealing in one by one to console the wife. If Potin's character as proclaimed that night in the death chamber could have been emblazoned upon a tablet, only those brought down from the mount by the great prophet could have surpassed it in virtue. This may have been largely owing to the mellowing qualities of Potin's liquors, which Auguste had been serving with a free hand ever since darkness had set in.

The comforters dropped away one by one as the night wore on until only Potin's intimates were left sitting about the long narrow table in the little arbor where they had gone, to avoid the heat of the café, and to talk more freely. A farm lantern suspended from the roof illuminated the circle of faces.

"A good man was Potin!" The blacksmith filled his glass again.

"A father and husband!" exclaimed Père Boudin, as he folded his red cotton handkerchief over his long thin nose and blew a loud blast within its depths.

"And still would be were it not for the cursed American," muttered Auguste, with a side glance at Lili who sat beside him, her eyes roving restlessly. She started slightly as he spoke; then her cheek fell into her palm

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and she never saw that her elbow, which rested upon the table was overturning the cobbler's glass.

"In England murderers are not allowed to go free!" The company turned at sound of Miss Dolchester's voice. She had loitered about the *auberge* ever since nightfall, and now stood at the end of the table, her canvas in one hand, her paint-box in the other, as though about to depart. "They are not allowed to go driving about the country with their paramours."

"Ho! Ho!" Père Boudin laughed. "To be sure! I met them in the woods over yonder. Turtle doves—Pretty birds—"

Lili jerked her arm off the table so suddenly that all the glasses jingled together, setting up a merry chime.

Her hands were doubled into rigid knots; her face became set in hard, vindictive lines. She breathed quicker and quicker.

Miss Dolchester leaned over the table as she laid her paint-box upon it. "There are cowards among you! Not one of you dare swear that the American did it! Not one of you! Cowards—all of you! Bah!" She swept her open hand across the arbor with a gesture of contempt, and catching up her paint-box disappeared.

"Turtle doves—pretty birds." murmured Boudin, looking down at his glass with scared eyes.

"He did it! I saw it! The American pushed him off!" Lili was on her feet, her face contorted with passion. "Why don't you go to Saint Valéry for the *gendarmes*? I swear he did it! I swear I saw him—O go! Go! Why don't you go?" She faced about, pant-

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ing, and looked at Auguste. He drew her down beside him with an exclamation of delight. "You will swear it little one?"

"I will swear it!"

"Before a judge?"

"Before a judge—but go! Why don't you go?" Again she was on her feet, wild-eyed, restless. Again Auguste drew her down and kept his arm close about her waist. His square jaws were set in determined lines. He was only too willing to act.

"Listen *mes amis*! I will go for the *gendarmes* now or it will be too late! The yellow head leaves for America in the morning! Boudin—you stay here! You Blondel stay also!" He moved as though about to leave, but the letter carrier raised his hand exclaiming—"One moment Auguste!" He whispered in the blacksmith's ear; they both smiled facetiously, then Boudin rose to his feet. "The daughter's testimony will avenge her noble parent's death. Auguste—we drink the good health of your future wife!"

He leered across the table at Lili as he extended his glass towards her. Her answer was a savage cry, as, wrenching herself from Auguste's embrace she tore Boudin's glass from his hand and hurled it into his face. Then looking neither to right nor left she fled into the blackness.

She had been staring at the lantern so long that she could not see. She ran blindly with hands extended before her, from what? Auguste? whose voice she could hear storming and cursing? The blacksmith? who once

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was close upon her heels? No—but from a gentle, pale face with a crown of shining, flaxen hair, which had flashed before her with reproachful blue eyes as the letter carrier offered his toast.

On she ran, stumbling over rocks, striking trees with such force as to reel backwards half stunned, then on again—on—on—the fair, tender face shining brighter, brighter, until her foot caught in a creeper and she fell face down. Then the floodgates of regret were loosed; the tears came, and with them an untold horror at what she had done.

“If you love me live a pure life.”

Ah! Merciful God, how she loved him.

All trembling, weak, unnerved, a poor suffering thing she lay there in the blackness, the words ringing in her ears. Then she started up again horrified. She could hear Auguste’s voice, he was going for the *gendarmes*. “*Dieu!*” What had she done? Felix to be arrested? She started back to stop Auguste, then halted again as she remembered how many had witnessed her oath.

With palms pressed against her temples she tried to think. Then of a sudden her face lighted. She became calm as she cautiously picked her way out of the woods and ran swiftly across the plain towards Bréport.

Chapter XXIX

FOR the last time the celestial choir had swept through the dusty old arches. For the last time Felix sat before the organ of Sotteville, and with uplifted, inspired face filled the place with melody. Alina sat by the confessional box. The sails of the little fishing fleet above her head had quivered with the rich vibrations, and two girlish figures came gliding in at the door. Felix stopped playing as a pair of happy innocent eyes lighted with intelligence and religious fervor, looked up at him from the dingy stairs of the organ loft.

"Ah Monsieur; how blessed that I can see you make God's music!"

"God's music, my little Marie?" He turned a peaceful inspired face upon her as his slender fingers glided over the keys into a maze of minor modulations.

"Yes; God's music. How can you make such music and not be near God?" Her hands were clasped upon her breast; tears of ecstatic joy were in her eyes.

His hands left the keys. He turned as she drew near and passed an arm about her. "So you think a heretic can sometimes get near God." He smiled, then he became serious as his long fingers again caressed the yellow keys. "Pray for me little one. Will you? Pray that I may be always there."

"As God gives me breath and life I will Monsieur, and so will Celeste."

Celeste stood silently by with downcast eyes and

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quivering lip. Once more the celestial symphony swept through the old Norman church and Felix was happy.

They made Celeste and Marie lunch with them beneath the trees within the shade of the church wall. The lunch had been specially prepared for the occasion by Mère Fouchet. There were head cheeses, delicious tart-lettes and *galettes*. Luscious plums and grapes and refreshing coffee which Ben brought from the café over the way.

When it came time to start home again, Ben caused riot and confusion in the camp. No, nothing would do but that he must walk home by the short path across the cliffs. He had packing to do; bills to pay in the village. Felix and Alina needn't hurry. They could drive back by Silleron and have a last look at the Château.

So they had driven through the long hot afternoon, a happy, contented look in Felix's eyes, a strange clutching sensation in Alina's throat whenever she thought of the morrow and the loneliness it would bring to her. All through the last dinner with Ben and Felix at the cottage, she had thought of it, and now with the blackness all about her, with the mutterings of an approaching storm keeping up a running accompaniment, she still thought of it as she sat in her bedroom window trying to catch any air that might be stirring.

She loved her boys with the same impartial love that had started so naturally, with such simple *naïveté* on that morning when she had burst through the hedge upon them as they sat at work.

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How long it seemed since then, and yet it was only a year; a year filled with untold happiness, although there had been suffering as well which counted not in the summing up.

Her "Plowman" was still unfinished. She would take it up again and work—work, and try to forget that "The Inseparables" had been separated. Work so well that Ben and Felix would some day be proud of her.

The tight feeling in her throat came again, and laying her head upon the window sill, she sobbed softly.

As though it were an echo, there came up from out the darkness below her another sob and she sat up listening, waiting, wondering.

It came again and again. She leaned out over the sunken lane and beheld a dusky figure standing with upraised arms.

"Mademoiselle! The *gendarmes*! They are coming to arrest him! Quick—help me to save him!"

Alina caught at the sill. "To arrest whom? Monsieur Felix? Why——" she smiled incredulously. "He is innocent! I was there! I know!"

"Innocent—yes innocent as God's angels—but—but—ah——"

The woman below seemed choking with emotion. "*Dieu me sauve!* Some one has sworn—forsworn their soul to Hell—lied! lied! *lied!* that they saw him do it. O quick Mademoiselle! He has bitter enemies, they will have him dead—guillotined! O Mademoiselle go quickly to the cottage—tell him to wait with his friend at the

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Smugglers' Gorge—a boat will be there—the potato sloop's skiff. I will see to it. He can escape to England and they will never know—Quick! Quick!”

The hoarse whisper died away into the night as Alina crept across the room and out into the dooryard so carefully that even restless little Jack slept on and never knew.

Free of the pebbly walk and the creaking gate, she sped up the lane and into the cool depths of the Leper's Road. She could see the path but dimly as she hurried along. She imagined once or twice that a shadowy form was flitting on before, sometimes far ahead, sometimes quite near.

As she neared the open space before the chapel she could see more distinctly and her heart gave a throb of pity as she saw a peasant woman running painfully as though half spent, her hand at her side. She disappeared behind the chapel and in a moment appeared upon the plain beyond, still running towards Sotteville.

Poor Lili! She struggled, panted, moaned as she hurried on, fearful lest she might be too late, only comforted by the thought that there was a dead calm and that it would delay the Jerseyman.

The Fisherman's Pier was rotten and disused. It had been a flimsy affair at its best. She ran eagerly over the rotting boards balancing herself with an old net pole which she had picked up at the pier head.

The Jerseyman had been true to his word. There was the skiff rising and falling upon the midnight tide.

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A Potato Boat.

The HONOR of the BRAXTONS

The Smugglers' Gorge was damp and lonely. They waited in a cave cut into the foot of the great, chalk cliff by countless tides.

Under the faint glow of a muffled lantern it looked weird and forbidding. Diabolical shapes worn in the soft chalk strata, with jagged pieces of black flint jutting forth upon every side suggested some ghastly chamber of the Inquisition.

It was not until they had discovered the cave that they had dared light the lantern. The descent through the Smugglers' Gorge had been most difficult. The men had begged Alina to say good-bye at the top of the cliff, but she would not listen to them. She feared neither the darkness nor the coming storm.

"I hope this is not some beastly trap that they have set for us." Ben lighted a cigarette and began to pace back and forth over a small stretch of sand before the cave's mouth. "You are quite sure it is all right Alina?"

"As sure as I am that that is Saint Margaret's light." She raised her hand and pointed through the night.

"And you say a peasant warned you?" Felix looked up from his place beside the lantern, about which he had wrapped some wet sea weed in order to screen it.

"Yes; but I couldn't see who it was—the voice sounded honest though." Alina spoke with averted face, her eyes still fixed upon Saint Margaret's light. Why need he know that Lili warned them.

"I am glad that I have at least one friend among them." He started up and gazed long and searchingly towards Sotteville.

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A long, painful silence fell upon them. A silence burdened with memories; the agony of parting, the loneliness of coming weeks.

Ben dare not speak lest he reveal his love. Felix dare not so much as look at her, yet he unconsciously disclosed his love by every word and action.

All unconscious of this; begrudging each fleeting moment; suffering from the unrest that forestalls every leave-taking, Alina watched her comrades with moist eyes.

They had become hers through months of tender care and sympathy. Their joys had been hers. The sharing of their misfortunes had been all the compensation she desired, excepting their affection. She could not measure her love for them. As soon think of measuring the joy which they had brought into her life, or try to measure the contentment at being always understood.

The suspense of the moment seemed to pervade the air. An ominous stillness was upon the face of nature. Not a ripple broke the glassy surface of the sea. Only the lazy swish of the gentle swell as it broke upon the beach could be heard.

Now and then the muffled thunder rolled heavily. They could feel the vibrations beneath their feet as they stood waiting—watching.

Presently a new sound coming from the direction of Sotteville made them start and listen with bated breath. It was the quick regular thud—thud of a pair of oars straining in their locks.

“Boys!” The one word, half sobbed, half spoken,

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startled the two men. She looked up into their faces, the dear honest eyes all tearful, her hands clutched behind, her arms straining nervously. "My dears! My boys! I *will*—I *must* tell you how I love you. It has all been so sweet—so unlike anything I ever knew before. I never had sisters—brothers—father—to love. Only an uncle and he called me queer because I wasn't like other girls; because I did things my own way. You never called me queer, boys; you always understood—you—you—" The tightness in her throat stifled her for a moment. Thud—thud—thud—came the sound of the rowers' strokes, nearer and nearer.

She cast an anxious glance into the darkness. Some instinct told her that the strokes were not those of a man—that Lili was rowing the boat. It must end then here—now—instantly.

She started forward. Was it to give the commonplace hand shake? Perhaps it had been her intention. They *should*, they *must* know that she loved them both more than anything else on earth.

It came so quick, like the passing of a sigh, this last, this only embrace, that the two men stood for a moment half dazed, looking into the blackness where she had flown.

With the soft touch of her hair still upon his cheek, the pressure of her lips still upon his own, Felix stood trembling.

Ben's chest rose and fell convulsively. He still felt the warm clinging arms about his neck. The oar strokes sounded close at hand. The boat grated upon the beach.

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"Come! we must go!" Ben turned towards Felix, they stood face to face—then it was that Felix discovered Ben's secret.

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Propelled by Ben's powerful strokes, the cranky little flat-bottomed skiff glided seawards. From his seat in the stern Felix could see a dark form crouching in the bows, the friendly peasant who had served him such a good turn.

He was too weak to think. The tension of the parting just over was relaxing its hold. He felt only a death-like indifference to all that was going on. One thought loomed up before him in gigantic proportions—Alina had gone out of his life—perhaps forever. He covered his face with his hands and leaned forward upon his knees. Ben rowed and rowed, the silent figure in the stern swaying with each vigorous stroke. He kept his course by the lightning flashes which constantly revealed the familiar landmarks of Bréport.

He turned occasionally to scan the glassy sea with anxious eyes. He dared not think what would be their fate should they by any chance miss the potato sloop.

A touch on the arm, a quick whisper warned him that he must stop rowing. They must wait and watch. So they waited and watched. It seemed long, interminable ages to Ben, but the night gave up nothing save the fierce flashes of lightning and the roar of the thunder.

Now and then the wind came in short, fitful gusts, churning the water into myriads of little waves which

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beat against the sides of their cockle shell with mimic fury.

Suddenly there came a brilliant flash, and with it a clap of thunder that made the boat tremble from stem to stern.

Felix caught the boat's side with blanched face as the cry of a terrified woman rose above the thunder rolls. "Row! Row! or you are lost! See! over there—they cross our bows! O God if I could only help!" Her cry was lost in the din of another crash almost over their heads. Ben set his teeth and pulled with all his might, never losing his presence of mind. Suddenly Felix heard him giving sharp, quick orders. "Quick Felix! My box of fusees—waistcoat pocket! Here—this side! Stand up! Light one! Take care! Brace yourself!"

As Felix struck the fusee his white face stood forth from the murky darkness like the materialization of some unhappy spirit.

The crouching form in the bow turned within its narrow space and a troubled face looked up at him. Great sad eyes mutely begging forgiveness, glowing with a great love, maybe born of passion, yet grown nobler through pain.

O how she loved that pale face. Would she not starve, drown, die for him? and yet—O God! She covered her eyes in bitter remorse. An hour ago she had all but perjured his life away.

The torture, the hate, the hell of an unreasoning jealousy had been as nothing compared with this remorse;

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this desolation of death, for she knew there was no life without him.

As the fusee went out, shouts came to them across the water. They were seen. Ben labored on for some moments when something like a moan of despair escaped his lips. Felix turned in his seat and beheld a great gray wall travelling towards them with awful rapidity.

Before he could turn again Ben gave a joyful cry, and dropping an oar he seized a rope which came coiling down from out the darkness, striking him upon the hand. He could hear the command of the sailor who had thrown it to make fast.

The sloop had beaten up against the light breeze to meet them. They could hear the reefed mainsail come rattling down, and the captain's quick orders.

"Name of a dog! What won't a woman do?" Captain Burns scowled as he caught the skiff's painter and made it fast. "Lend a hand! Quick Messieurs! I am short of men."

Lili stood holding the skiff in place with a short boat hook as the men scrambled aboard and hurried forward. The Captain swept his lantern before her face as he hastened after them. She met his jealous glance with a look of sullen defiance.

They were still struggling with the jib, which swelled and writhed about like some huge sea monster when the storm burst upon them.

The sloop keeled and Felix suddenly found himself lying in the lee scuppers which were awash. Half stunned, drenched to the skin, catching at anything

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within reach, he crawled along the deck towards the companionway. Again the sloop careened; he caught at a rope end; it proved to be the skiff's painter still knotted to the shrouds. The sloop mounted a huge wave and he was thrown backwards. Again he caught at something. This time it proved to be the handle of Lili's boat hook wedged tightly into the knotted cordage.

There was a scared look in his face as he reached through the darkness for the painter. He was searching for the end which went over the sloop's side. There was no resistance as he drew it towards him. He passed his fingers over the end and uttered a cry of horror. It had been cut with a knife. "Captain! The skiff! Lili! Where is she?"

For a moment the sloop rode upon an even keel and he struggled to his feet, peering through the driving deluge.

He thought he heard the thud—thud—of oars straining in their locks only a few yards away in the darkness. "Lili! Lili! Lili!" he shrieked.

Then as he listened there came out of the hissing, seething storm a faint wail, a muffled cry. As though the heavens had been rent in twain there followed crash upon crash, and he fell back upon the deck, where Ben found him unconscious.

Chapter XXX

PATCHES of sodden snow still lingered along the shaded, sunken lanes. Within the shadow of the great courtyard wall it lay cold and blue. Seductive sunlight mantled the wall top, the oozy sod, the well-house roof where the doves cooed and quarreled and strutted.

Upon a bank beside the great granite doorstep lolled a drowsy-eyed setter, who lazily watched her litter of puppies as they climbed and rolled and climbed the bank again.

The tame crow sat upon a nearby apple tree with ruffled feathers, one leg tucked up under his wing, his head slowly, wisely revolving. He gave a purposeless, melancholy caw and fell to plucking his plumage. Suddenly as a door slammed he spread his wings and flew across the court with much ado. His old enemies the doves had stolen a march on him. Alina stood before the stable door feeding the doves from her tam-o-shanter which was filled with oats. She closed her eyes and laughed as the soft wings brushed her cheek. They would not wait for her to dole out the oats, but fell upon her pell-mell, a struggling feathery mass.

Her cheeks flushed; her eyes sparkled; she laughed aloud at the impudence of her feathered friends.

"Ah, what a waste of oats!" exclaimed the *Maître*, who stood smiling in the studio door, "but I would give all the oats of Normandy my child to paint you as you are



On the road to the Chariot d'Or.

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at this moment—Go on you black imp! You spoil the picture!" He picked up a clod and shied it at the crow who sailed back to his apple tree with a succession of angry caws.

"Now *Maitre!*" Alina looked up reproachfully as Schock seated himself in the stable doorway, "that is your only fault."

"No! No! my child—" he raised his hands protestingly "there is no class now—there can be no jealousies—I must—I will tell you when you are beautiful."

The setter came ambling across the court, followed by her litter, and laid her chin upon his knee.

"But you never say those things to M'lle Chauvin!" Alina caught up one of the puppies and cuddled him in her neck.

The *Maitre* laughed—"M'lle Chauvin, with a head like a cow."

"Or M'lle Topsue, or Blanc or Schovatsky, or Miss Dolchester."

"How can one compliment her? *Sérieusement, Mademoiselle*; I am glad she is no longer my pupil. Her life is one great lie. Bah—I wonder whose baby she is drugging now? They say she is at Grand Merville. She found some *motifs* there last August.

With a sad, far away look in her eyes, Alina cuddled the puppy so tightly that he whined and kicked. The mention of Grand Merville brought up a host of memories.

The *Maitre* saw his mistake and was glad to call out. "Ah—here comes the wagon for our *envois*."

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Just to think of sending one's Salon picture from the same studio, boxed by the same carpenter, piled into the same van along with the *envoi* of one of France's greatest masters.

Alina stood by as the boxes were carefully lifted into the cart, thinking of all the kind things that Schock had said of her "Plowman," and wondering what would be its fate.

As the blue painted wagon rumbled out through the gateway and down the lane, she followed it for a time, then as it disappeared around a curve, turned into the Leper's Road with the sense of mingled freedom and suspense that always follows the departure of the *envoi*.

She turned into a rutted, disused road, and was soon striding across the plain towards Silleron. There were signs of spring at every turn. The plowing had begun and she stopped more than once to watch the heavy-footed horses plunging through the rich, sodden earth, which sent up a delightful aroma.

She found herself standing alone upon the brow of the hill above Blosseville, where the Inseparables had stood on that frosty Christmas night. She could see the wood of Blosseville lying below, and the smoke rising from the little *auberge*.

The picture sent a long chain of recollections coursing through her brain, ending with the farewell at the Smug-gler's Gorge. So, as she walked she ceased to notice the plowing and planting, and there were tears in her eyes as she came to a sudden standstill beneath the walls of

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the Château of Silleron. Her face broke into a smile as a shrill whinny greeted her ears.

She pushed her way through a broken hedge, and in a moment was in the box stall with her arms about the mare's neck. She had not been at Silleron since snow first fell. The Count in America, the great silent Château practically deserted, she had not had the heart to come, notwithstanding the Count's invitation to ride the mare whenever she chose.

"Dear old girlie! You knew my step after all these months! There—there's a lump from Ben and a lump from Felix and a lump from me!" She playfully laid her cheek against the soft, silken nose as she doled out the sugar lumps.

"How Ben would love to see you! How Felix would fondle you. Ah me——" She looked yearningly into the great intelligent eyes. "I can talk with you about everything, and you will never tell." She had much to tell for it was a good hour before she quitted the box stall with a contented face. Her heart was lighter for she had unburdened it, and fully trusted her *confidante*.

"Bye-bye-girlie! Don't cry! I will come again!"

The mare poked her nose through the small window and kept up a shrill whinnying as long as she could hear Alina's footsteps.

She struck across the plain towards Sotteville. The ground was oozy and the grass still matted and heavy with the winter rains. So after walking a while, she sought a warm dry bank and rested a few moments.

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A little way off the thatched roof of a fisherman's hut rose above some gnarled apple trees. All about, draped upon the bushes in fantastic loops, were the nets that bespoke the cottager's trade.

She only half noticed the sound of voices coming from beyond the apple trees.

"*L'Etoile de Mer?* Yes Monsieur; that is my boat and I am still sailing her and expect to sail her for many years. Speak more plainly Monsieur; your French is bad—Jersey? Aye; I thought you hailed from there. Looking for Lili? Then you must cease looking for she is dead. You doubt it? You, a sailor talk of a woman rowing ashore in that gale? Impossible! They found her the next morning on the beach. You loved her? Ho! Ho! a *sou* for such love! An ass you were besides—and you never knew she loved the tow-head whom you carried to England? Ho! Ho!"

The shrill, crackling voice of the aged fisherman came sharply to her ears. The other voice was pitched so low as to be almost inaudible.

"And she was going to England with you? The greater fool she would have been! A fig for a sailor's love! She is better dead—better dead.

Alina waited to hear no more. She slid down the bank and started along the field bordering the sunken road. She knew now why the potato-boat had waited so willingly in the offing on that wild autumn night.

She started down the high bank, and was seeking a foothold in the slippery clay, when a horny sailor's hand

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was raised to hers and a face in which played all the sunlight of Capri looked up at her with ardent eyes.

She started; his "Permit me Miss," uttered in Billingsgate English, sounded so strange out in these Norman fields.

The burning black eyes rested admiringly upon hers. He seemed counting upon her company, but with lowered eyes she said—"Thank you for your kindness," and started up the hill.

She knew that he watched her for some moments. She could feel the look of those burning passionate eyes, and she knew that Lili's love for Felix had been tried by fire.

She wondered if sunlight like this existed anywhere else in the world. The frost might be somewhere below the soft humid soil, but something in the air told her that the primroses holding up their sunny faces courageously along the sunbaked banks had not been betrayed into forcing the season.

Dear little heralds of Spring. She knelt and enclosing a cluster of flowers within her two hands, buried her face in the cool, fresh, sweet-smelling bed.

It was natural that her eyes should have taken on that far away look once more as she lifted her head and then buried her face time and time again.

Sounds recall much; objects more; but some subtle scent stealing through the senses like a sweet, sad intoxicant, will make the heart beat and the blood bound as though there had been no weeks or months or years.

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Once more she reached the Leper's Road, and was not far from the chapel of Our Lady of the Valley, when she turned at sound of heavy foot falls. It was Père Boudin sorting over his letters as he walked.

He lifted his cap obsequiously as he loitered past. "Mademoiselle has sent her picture to the Salon! They say Mademoiselle will take a *mention* this year. The *Maitre* has influence—great influence! Mademoiselle is glad?"

He raised his eyebrows questioningly. Alina's only reply was a cold, stony stare. She had not forgotten Grand Merville.

The letter carrier shrugged his shoulders and started on again, but halted after a few steps. "*Attendez!*" he ran over his letters. "Yes; here it is, a letter for Mademoiselle—from Boston—the Messieurs are well?" he raised his eyebrows again as he held out the letter, but she took it from his hand with a quick, cold "*Merci!*" and thrusting it into her pocket started down the road.

Felix's letters came with fitful irregularity. At times they were full of hope, written with all the dash of his boyish, impulsive self. At other times she would steal away to read them alone, for the tears would come and the *Maitre* must not see.

Ben wrote his eight pages each week with unwavering regularity. His letters were always helpful, uplifting, cheerful. They braced her for work. They told her all the little details of the men's lives; how he and Felix had taken a Harcourt Studio which was Felix's home,



"The studio was Felix's home."

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how he lived at home with his parents, spending his days with Felix at the studio.

The winter had passed quickly in spite of a great loneliness which at times all but drove her to Paris. The Master had taken her to him as though she had been the daughter of his old age, and urged her on to noble efforts, with results that brought the happy glow of pride to her cheeks as he praised the virility which characterized her work.

The other pupils had gone to Paris for the winter, so all through the long months master and pupil worked in the great glass-walled, glass-roofed studio, where there was the light of out of doors with none of the discomforts of winter.

Alina waited until Père Boudin was out of sight before she broke the letter's seal. It was from Ben. Within she found a second sealed envelope upon which was written—"Open only when alone."

"Alone?" Her eyes fell upon the lonely chapel of Our Lady of the Valley.

Crossing the little greensward she approached the low door and peered within. The place was as silent as death. A few straggling rays of the setting sun illumined the paper flowers upon the rude little altar. The chapel was damp and cold. What wonder—there had been no fire there for three hundred years. Entering, she broke the seal of the second envelope and read.

* * * * *

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Excepting on fête days the chapel of Our Lady of the Valley was but little used by the peasantry. They had a preference for St. Martin's with its garish decorations and vested choir.

Two slender girlish forms however, came and went each day at sun-down, bringing old-fashioned garden flowers, which they placed before the crude image of Our Lady of the Valley.

But this was not their only mission. They had proven the efficacy of prayer at the Pool of St. Mathilde. They came to pray. Prayer had brought life, peace, joy to them; why should it not to others?

As they came over the fields they prattled on in simple girlish fashion. "And you miss posing for Monsieur Felix, Celeste?" Little Marie's eyes rested upon her cousin's with a troubled look.

Celeste's only reply was a downward glance, while a conscious flush colored her delicate cheek, then subsiding left her face as pale as it had been before.

"We must pray for him Marie! Pray—pray—that he may live. O Marie; I can't pray as I ought—I—I—" She buried her face in her arm and sobbed.

"You love him!" Little Marie's arm was laid caressingly about her cousin's form. "It is no sin Celeste, to love as you love. The good Curé has told me so. Come! let us pray and perhaps he will come back to us again and finish the Virgin of Wisdom and then——" she smiled and drew Celeste towards the chapel door "Who knows what will happen."

As they entered they dipped their fingers in the Holy

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font, and crossing themselves, selected places directly before the altar.

While she used the prayer-book and rosary for the greater part, Celeste would often formulate prayers of her own, the rhythmic beauty of which little Marie had never before heard.

Her gentle, melodious voice echoed through the silent chapel—"Our Blessed Lady of the Valley, Mother of Jesus, thou hast succored those who truly believe. Blessed Virgin before the throne of God, hear us now; succor him; make him well; breathe into his nostrils thy breath. Fill him with thy spirit lest he die."

A low moan resounded through the place, but it came from neither of the girls.

"Holy Mother save him! Save him! If he die we cannot live!"

Again the moan mingled with the dying echoes of Celeste's silvery voice, so distinctly that the girls started apprehensively.

"Stop! Stop! I implore you! You *must not*! It is useless! He is dead!"

Poor innocent little Celeste. She clasped her slender hands upon her breast and looked with horror and wonderment upon the distracted, tear-stained face that appeared between her and the altar.

"Ah Mademoiselle—is it you?"

Alina thrust a crumpled letter towards the girl as she closed her hand over her eyes and, falling upon the altar steps, cried as though her heart would break.

Chapter XXXI

THE Count and Swami stood before a half opened case which had been tilted against the wall.

Celeste's girlish face looked out at them from between the boards. It was the unfinished Virgin of Wisdom.

As they looked, a burst of melody came up to them from below. They turned upon Ben with questioning eyes.

He smiled. "You are in America my friends! In this country commerce and art shoulder up against each other in a remarkable way. These studios are over an organ factory. The tuning process used to drive Felix nearly crazy, poor fellow. The only satisfaction he had was in playing the organs after they were finished. He could always lose himself in music you know."

"Lose himself!" exclaimed the Swami. "Ah; there you strike the keynote of the situation. Had he forgotten himself and claimed his full spiritual birthright, he might be here in the body to-day. You say the superstition of his childhood came true?"

Ben's face saddened at the question. What wonder. He had found a cold, silent form lying across the studio table on the morning of Felix's twenty-fifth birthday.

"Yes;" he replied, "it came true." His voice half failed him as he uttered the words.

"Poor boy—" said the Count, "think of going through life with such an incubus as that!"

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The Swami raised his right hand with a characteristic gesture and swept it downwards. "My friends if all the doctors in Christendom had pronounced this sentence, using all the precedents of all time, he need not have died. Fear clogged the valves of his heart—" The Swami stopped abruptly and glanced at the door. Somebody had rattled the brass knocker.

Ben opened the door. It was not necessary that the tall old gentleman standing without should have said—"Colonel Braxton, sir! I have come from Virginia to talk with you of my son Felix, and various matters pertaining to him!"

His voice quavered as he seized Ben's hand. "I thank you sir for your courtesy and kindness during this trying time." Then as he saw Ben's visitors, he halted with unruffled dignity exclaiming, "I will call again. I reckon you would prefer it—perhaps we could talk better —"

"No! No!" Ben drew him into the room. "These are old friends of Felix's and mine. We knew them in France."

The nobleman of France bore himself no better than the aristocrat of the Old Dominion as they went through the formality of an introduction, though the latter's rusty frock coat was pathetically old, and his elaborate bow would have better suited a Queen's Drawing Room than this organ-loft studio.

The Swami's swarthy face disturbed the Colonel. It was not until the sound of the Hindu's wonderful voice reached his ears and he heard the pure, rhythmic Eng-

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lish, that he felt sure of his being the right sort of a person to meet. He had heard such strange tales of Yankee predilection for negroes that he was on his guard.

He had not been North for forty years. Everything was new and confusing. He had felt peculiarly helpless in the noisy New England city. The subways had taxed his fortitude to its fullest extent. The whirl of the streets dazed him, but here it was peaceful and restful. The Swami was saying pleasant things of Virginia, which he and the Count had visited in the course of their travels. He spoke of Felix in a way that brought tears to the father's eyes. He called him great—a genius.

The Colonel was constrained to say—"Then you really think my son was pursuing a proper vocation for a gentleman?" He laid particular stress upon "gentleman." I have had a fear of late that I may possibly have misunderstood him. You know we disagreed in the beginning." The Colonel flushed a little. "There were things about his art which were not chaste, decent, to my mind. God forbid that I should have wronged him. He was sensitive and took it hard, but I was forced to sustain the honor of the Braxtons." He rose to his feet and straightened himself to his full height. A hand was thrust into the front of his coat.

Ben laid a kindly hand upon the Colonel's arm, bidding him be seated again. "Yes; Felix was sensitive! The Swami was just saying that he would be living to-day had it not been for a superstition, a morbid fear of death."

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“Superstition? Fear of death?” The Colonel looked up nonplussed, his long sensitive fingers (they were so like Felix’s) tightly clutching the arms of the antique chair.

“When he was a little boy!” Ben spoke softly “Can’t you recall the day that he ran a race with little black Joe and you had to call the doctor because he fainted?”

The long fingers relaxed their hold upon the chair arm. Ben’s short sentences had set a chain of recollections in operation.

The Colonel rose and paced the floor as he was wont to pace the great hall at Oaklands when recalling the past—he lived so much in the past—it was so easy to recall the happy days before the war, but this thing happened after Appomattox; he had barely lived since then and when one barely lives, things do not stamp themselves upon the mind.

He continued to pace back and forth for some moments; then halted abruptly as he pressed a forefinger and thumb against his eyeballs.

“Ah yes; now I remember it all. His mother had died that spring. My sorrow had blotted out much that happened afterwards. Yes; I sent for Dr. Drayton. I remember how he laughed as he drove up in his chaise and found Felix playing upon the porch with little Joe. He almost believed I had fooled him. His diagnosis? Well, as far as I can remember now, it was a case of green apples and too much hot sun.” He smiled.

Ben’s eyes met the Swami’s in mutual surprise as he exclaimed “But Felix told another story.”

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The Colonel was just about to seat himself but turned an astonished face upon Ben. "A different story?"

"Yes; he said the doctor tried to hoodwink him into believing that there was nothing the matter, but stated the truth to you after you had sent the boy from the room."

"Ah, but how did he—" The Colonel did not finish his sentence so eager was Ben to solve the mystery of Felix's life. "The window was open—he listened outside. He heard the doctor say 'If he lives to be sixteen he will die at twenty-five.'"

The Colonel was pacing the floor once more. Again he pressed his eyeballs with the tips of his tapering fingers. His eyebrows met in a puzzled scowl. "No! No! He never said that of Felix. We must—have been—talking—*We were!* I remember now! *We were talking of another case over in Charlottesville; a weakling from birth—*My God—do you say Felix believed this of himself?"

The faces of the three men answered his question long before the Swami's deep voice filled the room—"He did! Your son's spirit left the body through the action of wrong thought! As a man thinketh so is he! Thought guides the body as it will! But he lives—there is no death! Life is Spirit and Spirit never dies!"

The slender fingers were once more clutching the carved chair arms. The clear cut face was bowed in thought. He saw a flaxen haired child in an old fashioned flower garden, pulling handfuls of bright asters. Hover-

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ing over him, guarding him from the swarming bees was a dear face which shone with a mother's love.

The sensitive fingers left the arms of the chair and the Colonel's face fell into his hands.

There was a tone of regret in Ben's voice—"I fear it will be impossible for me to send anything over to the scholarship committee. I cannot recall that Felix finished a single picture and yet he was a most brilliant worker. He took prize after prize for academy work. These studies—" he waved his hand at a long row which stood along the side of the room, "are masterly! But unfortunately they are not pictures. The scholarship committee want pictures." He turned to the janitor—

"You may open that big box! Another unfinished one!" he explained. "This would have been the masterpiece of his life. It was to have been a *Psyche*."

Ben reached over to steady the case from which the janitor was wrenching the cover.

As the last obstinate nail gave way, he seized the filmy cheese cloth which had been loosely tacked across the canvas and tore it off with one sweep of the hand. The wonderful eyes greeted him as of old, but he uttered a quick cry—a cry of joy.

There were the youthful shoulders, the pearly pulsing bosom; the flexuous, tapering arms and hands; the long classic sweep of maidenly thigh; the young, well rounded lower limbs and delicately modeled feet supporting all so firmly and well.

"When did he do it? He had no model! He gave it

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up, I know he did!" then as Ben encountered the Swami's exultant, victorious look he involuntarily exclaimed—"You know?"

"Yes; I know, for I saw the spirit of man dealing with pigments and canvas as the Master of masters deals with men and things, counting them as naught except as they reveal love, divine and eternal."

The Swami laid a hand upon Ben's arm—"You have not forgotten the 'Painter of Dreams'? The seed sown on that Christmas night fell in rich soil and rooted and grew until like the Painter of Dreams, Felix cast aside academy precedents and models and painted purity in the form of woman."

There was a long silence. "You wonder when he did it—why need you? There were times when The Inseparables were separated. Ah my friend; you forget how often and long you rode with her."

The Swami stopped for a moment, then as the conscious color stole to Ben's ruddy cheeks, he went on—

"When the Psyche was finished and he had seen the healing at the Pool, Felix's victory was all but won. Then—ah well—you have told me of the tragedy of Mont Carmel when the image of fear was once more photographed upon his consciousness, as for the rest—"

The Swami covered his eyes for a moment and swept his hands downwards and outwards with a gesture which suggested the casting aside of a hateful memory.

Again there was a long silence. Someone was playing a series of minor modulations upon the organ below.

They continued to gaze at the Psyche, the nude in



The conical roofed well house.

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which there was no nakedness, for she was clothed in that which had shamed the Colonel to silence as he started to raise a protesting hand, a silence from which he awoke with a burdened heart, for he knew that he had wronged his son on that August day when he had sent him forth from Oaklands.

Chapter XXXII

MÈRE FOUCHET was there. Celeste was there. Little Marie was smiling a farewell through her tears as she watched the men pile Alina's boxes on to the top of the dusty old diligence.

The *Maître* had helped her mount to the roof seat and now sat beside her for they were on their way to Paris and the *vernissage*.

Obsequious, smiling, Père Boudin was there. He had even handed up Jack to Alina. She deposited the dog upon the seat between her and the *Maître*.

"*Hola! Arrêtez!*" The driver was gathering up his reins. Boudin climbed up the side of the diligence again with something in his hand. "A letter Mademoiselle—I all but forgot it!"

She thrust it into her pocket and waved a farewell to Mère Fouchet. The old peasant woman's broad chest was heaving. Tears were coursing down her heavily seamed face, but she stood bravely smiling a last farewell.

Alina had assured her that it was not good bye for always, but something told the honest old foster mother's heart that she would never see Alina again.

The rickety old diligence slowly toiled upwards to the plain. Alina turned in her seat as they reached the top.

There was Bréport lying below, the morning mists still lingering and mingling with the smoke from the *chaumières*. The bell of St. Martin's was striking nine. A flock of pigeons flew upwards, circled about and descended

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upon a conical shaped well roof jutting upwards from among the trees.

"They are unhappy," said the *Maitre* noticing the flight. "They know we have gone."

There was Sotteville beyond the stretch of moor; the mackerel boats in the offing, a toy fleet upon a sheet of turquoise. Far beyond against the purple gray horizon Saint Margaret's light, a cream white column mounting the headland, shone in the morning sunlight.

Then as her eyes swept across the familiar stretch of rolling plain that she had come to love so well, they encountered the gables and towers of Silleron and she wondered if the Count knew about Felix.

And so they drove through the May morning until at last the driver put on the brakes and with much creaking and grinding the diligence rattled down the hill into Saint Valery and pulled up before the station.

It was a branch road. The stops were frequent and the waits long, but the *Maitre* was in excellent spirits. He had received a letter that morning from his friend Chalon saying that his picture had been given a place of honor in one of the important salons.

He smilingly hinted that he was not the only one coming in for honors that year—(just as though he had not already taken all the honors possible), that there was a pleasant surprise awaiting her when she should have arrived in Paris. "*Nous verrons! Nous verrons,*" he repeated over and over until Alina all mystified and curious would break into smiles and call him a tease.

It was not until they had been coupled to the *rapide*

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from Havre at Motteville and were speeding on towards Paris that Alina suddenly remembering the letter, took it from her pocket and tore it open. It was addressed by Ben.

She started as she recognized Felix's handwriting upon one of the sheets.

"Dear Alina;" Ben's letter ran, "Not long ago I asked you to read a letter when alone. Will you do me the same kindness when you open this?"

Alina glanced across at the *Maitre*. He was buried behind his *Figaro*.

"I have tried to write you all about Felix during the last few weeks, but have failed. I have not written all. No—not even though it were his wish that I should. No; not even though my own life is in the balance. I have done you a wrong. I have withheld a letter upon which Felix's cheek rested when I found him that morning. He must have been writing it when death came, you see it is unfinished.

"I could not send it before. It would have been sacrilege even though they were his last words to you. It would have been selfish, brutal in the light of his love; so out of respect for his memory, I have held it until now.

"He asks for me that which I should have asked long ago in far away Normandy had I not known that by the asking I should have separated the Inseparables."

Alina could not see the ending or signature because—ah well; tears sometimes mean joy as well as sorrow and perhaps they meant both in her case.

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Dear, noble, great hearted Ben. She suppressed a sob and watched the velvety meadows go reeling by.

At last she felt sure of herself and unfolded the other sheet with reverential touch.

“DEAREST HEART:

“How often was I tempted to call you thus, time and time again in those dear days when we three lived and laughed and suffered together. God’s greatest gift to me was when your sweet face met mine. Life’s greatest sorrow came when with the touch of your lips still upon mine, I drifted in that hated boat through the storm, away from our Acadia, from you, from life itself.

“I have not lived since then. That hideous vampire which rarely came when you were with me, has closed in upon me and clung closer and closer, drawing at my heart’s blood until—I hasten to tell you my love lest in a day, or an hour, or a few moments it may be too late.

“This is my twenty-fifth birthday. You have not forgotten my confession at the foot of the cross? Then you know why I am anxious.

“I had sinned and my past was hawked before your eyes in all its nakedness. I fought against a premonition—a curse and you saw me weaken day by day.

“I love you dearest, for your noble spirit that counted not a man’s errors his all. I love you dearest for believing in me. For recognizing that though a slave to technique and my own fears, I could attain noble ideals.

“I claim nothing! I ask nothing except that you permit dear Ben to claim that which is already his.

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"Yes; dearest I know it! I saw it that last night upon the beach. I saw it although you barely knew it yourself. Let nothing come between you and the noblest man living. He loves you as you should be loved, with a greatness and gentleness that cannot be measured.

"I have been impelled to write this morning. Something tells me that my heart which has gradually been weakening will suddenly stop, and I wanted you to know all. You have been my life—my love—my all. You have been my hope, my support—my——"

That was all save some blots.

She closed her eyes and dropping the letter into her lap let her head fall back into the cushioned corner. She remained a long time thus until the *Mâitre* sprang to his feet muttering—"Sapristi, Mademoiselle! read that!" He pointed to a paragraph under the head of tragedies. "An apostle of realism. A *demoiselle Anglaise*. Pupil of the *Académie Julian* and Schöck the great animal painter, met her death at Grand Merville yesterday in a most singular manner. She was sketching by the river bank when attacked from behind by a legless beggar known as The Soldier of France, who beat her to death with his heavy oaken crutch. When arrested and accused he made no denial. He had just been serving a term in jail for perjury and had only been liberated that morning. His only excuse was that he hated her because she had been the cause of his imprisonment. The local authorities say that the beggar was imprisoned for trying to incriminate an American artist suspected of pushing a

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peasant from the top of Mont Carmel a year ago during the fêtes of St. Mathilde.

“The beggar had been bribed and it is reasonable to suppose that the young English woman was the person who had bribed him.”

Yes, it was awful; revolting in its ghastliness, but she again fell to watching the fleeting meadows and winding river.

The *Maitre* regarded her with curious eyes, then his glance encountered the letter lying in her lap.

With that wonderful intuition peculiar to the French, the intuition that reads more in one action, one look, than an Anglo-Saxon reads in volumes, he settled back into his corner and once more read his *Figaro*.

Chapter XXXIII

SHIPS flying the colors of King George had brought the bricks of this old homestead from England. The birth-place of that other George who had given the Hanoverian so much trouble, was but a few leagues distant. Great oaks shaded the drive-way from lower to upper gate from which point was an uninterrupted view of the valley and town below. Beyond, hemming in the horizon, was the hazy, billowy line of the Blue Ridge.

The monotonous tune of the locust filled the mid-summer air. Now and then the hoarse croaking of crows would echo along the avenue of oaks. An army of bees were hard at work in the two old-fashioned flower beds upon either side of the great porch, some of them quarreling with a gorgeous green humming-bird who fancied that the fragrant honeysuckle climbing up the trellis was for him alone.

The August sunlight enveloped all with such fervor that wavy lines of heat rose from the surrounding fields. An aged negro sat upon the lowest of the porch steps, his chin upon his chest, his bald pate shining like an ebony ball. His elbows rested disjointedly upon his knees. The wrinkled, bony hands hung listlessly downwards, he was sleeping peacefully.

"Pompey! O Pompey!" called a voice from within.

He awoke with a start; "Bress ma soul! Dar's Marse Braxton callin' an' I ain't pulled dem flowers yet!" struggling to his feet he shuffled off towards the flower beds.

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"Pompey! Pompey! Where are those flowers? You rascal! You've been sleeping again I suppose!" The master of Oaklands stood frowning from the porch.

Pompey stopped and listened with feigned surprise. He turned an aggrieved face towards his master.

"Dees yer varmint's am de wusset I ever did see!" He swished away the bees as he took a sly side glance at the Colonel. "Go on you varmint's! Doan yer know Pompey is pulling dese yer flowers to decolcate young Marse Felix's grave? Doan yer know young Marse Felix is dead? Doan yer know old Pompey loved him like his own chile?"

"Come you have pulled enough! We will go down now!" Colonel Braxton opened the gate and stood aside. As the aged negro passed, the lines about the Colonel's mouth and jaw softened. There was a tender look in his eyes. Felix had loved old Pompey.

They descended the weedy walk. Pompey shuffling on ahead, bent with his burden of sweet peas, branching roses and purple asters. He put them down when they neared the middle gate and hurrying ahead opened it for the Colonel, waiting respectfully until he had passed through; then, gathering them up again, followed his master.

They turned off to the left where a pasture bordered the roadway. A simple slab of slate marked the spot.

The Colonel stood with bent, bared head, while the old negro cleared away the withered flowers of yesterday and tenderly strewed the grave with the fresh sweet smell-

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ing mass, then falling upon his knees with bowed head muttered a fervent, half audible prayer.

The Colonel stood for a long time lost in his own meditations. This was all that he could do for Felix now. He had loved the boy but had misunderstood and wronged him. The consciousness of this mistake had whitened his head and deepened the lines in his sensitive face.

The insolence of dunning creditors, the land of his ancestors all gone, the very bricks and mortar of Oaklands mortgaged and the foreclosure imminent; the roof which had sheltered the Braxtons since King George's days about to be wrested from him, these and a hundred other things he counted as naught in the gloom of this greatest, crowning sorrow of his life.

At last they started back. When Pompey closed the upper gate behind the Colonel, he espied his boy Joe.

"Whar yer bin yer good fur nothin nigger? Loafin in de pos office? Gib der Cunnel dat letter! Doan yer see him waitin fur it?"

The Colonel seated himself upon the porch and putting on his eyeglasses scanned the envelope.

"Boston? from Felix's friend Cushing of course."

He tore it open and drew forth the contents. A check fluttered to the floor. He flushed and unconsciously drew himself up in his chair. Had he not told Mr. Cushing that the Braxtons had never been mendicants? What did he mean by sending this check?

"My dear Colonel Braxton:" Ben's letter ran, "Do not be alarmed when you see the enclosed check. I am not making mendicants of the Braxtons.

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"You see I have not forgotten your reply when I offered to help you at the time of your visit North.

"Felix's picture which I sent to the Paris Salon has been the sensation of the year. It received an Honorable Mention and was bought by a millionaire who will present it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"Enclosed is his check for eight thousand dollars. I think you told me that five thousand would save Oaklands. No one is happier than I that Felix should have sustained the family honor in so substantial and noble a manner, for I loved him as a brother.

"Most cordially yours,

"BENJAMIN CUSHING."

* * * * *

Alina sat in deep thought, her hands folded over her riding stick, her chin resting lightly upon them. She had sat thus for a long time. The guardians had stared to see a young woman in a riding habit pass up the stairway and across the silent gallery.

The place was practically deserted. She had seen the Psyche surrounded by throngs at the Paris Salon. More than once tears of joy had welled to her eyes as she stood in the crowd and listened to exclamations of wonder and praise, and yet it had been a sort of aggravation withal for she kept thinking how the pale, fair face and blue eyes would have lighted with pride; the scholarship vindicated; Oaklands saved; the honor of the Braxtons most gloriously maintained; the false, unjust cloud under

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which he had left his father swept away ; the world better for the creation of a noble masterpiece.

Now for the first time she sat before it alone. Hers was an artist soul possessed of that intelligence which sees the Creator's chaste spirit pervading all things, its loveliness in all nature, and nowhere so transcendently beautiful and pure as in the unveiled body that enshrines the soul of man.

She thought of how Felix's genius, even through the mistaken means of a first passion, had fixed upon canvas the face of his ideal. She thought of his terrible awakening, then that long, hopeless stretch of months, the disgrace of an unfulfilled scholarship hanging over him, his ideal ever with him crying out for expression in spite of the sinking heart, the suspended sword. She kept her eyes closed for some time ; it was not necessary to open them in order to see the Psyche for there she was in all her innocent loveliness looking out from the obscurity of a little Norman cottage loft. Once more she was sitting upon a pile of straw. She seemed to scent the pungent, musty odor of the straw and dried herbs hanging from the rafters. She could hear the twittering of birds and the pattering of their tiny feet upon the roof over-head.

She sees a dear, pale, distraught face peering out from the attic's gloom. She hears his cry, a yearning, pleading voice begging her not to cast him off, then—how it happens she does not clearly see, but her hands are gently caressing his sunny head for he has thrown himself at her feet.

She can hear her own words and once more sees the

The HONOR of the BRAXTONS

wondrous happiness in his face as she utters them—"Ah Felix; Don't! don't cry like that! You might fail ever so badly, but I should always have to forgive you because—because—" She had never told him why.

She sat with closed eyes, her lips parted, great hot tears coursing down her cheeks.

* * * * *

There was a step beside her. She opened her eyes. "Ben!" She laid her hand tenderly within her husband's.

"Yes dearest; I have been here some time."

His voice quavered as he met her tearful glance. With fingers interlocked in loving clasp they sat long in silence looking at the Psyche.

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